PHD

AN ANALYSIS OF HOW ACCOUNTABILITY IS IMPLEMENTED IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM IN QATAR

Al-Kaabi, Nouf

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By

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I am the author of this thesis, and the work described therein was carried out by myself personally.

Nouf Abdulla Al-Kaabi

Acknowledgment

My mother, the one who strongly believed that her daughter should never settle for good when excellent was an option.

My father, the man who unconditionally supported my learning and professional journey through his wisdom.

My sisters and brothers who felt genuinely proud of my pursuits and supported me all the way.

My nieces and nephews, who usually wondered when I would finish working on my laptop to join more family trips and dinners.

My colleagues and friends who strongly felt that I can and will contribute in the development of my country's education.

I dedicate this to you. The journey has not finished; it has just started.

Abstract

Qatar's *Education for a New Era* reform changed the landscape of education in the country. Due to its scope and impact, the reform remains a topic of interest for Qatar's educators and researchers after sixteen years from its launch in 2004. The reform restructured how education was governed; shifting from a strictly centralised to a decentralised system that emphasised novel principles: autonomy, choice, variety, and accountability. With heavy reliance on western agencies in the design and implementation, the reform plans did not roll out as smoothly as expected and policymakers received continuous criticism. In 2016, the government called for more control and claimed its authority returning to centralised control over government schools.

Although many of the reform initiatives and principles came to an end, accountability remained because of its alignment with a centralised education system. Hence, the thesis investigates the principle of accountability to identify its core mechanisms, learn about the perceptions of stakeholders, and elicit lessons learned to inform future improvement efforts. The thesis consists of six chapters that provide a clear description of the Qatari educational context, an extensive survey of literature, a description of the research methodology, and a thorough discussion of findings to address the research objectives. The thesis uses qualitative methods that include document analysis and interviews to answer the research questions.

The thesis revealed three key findings: (1) the implementation of the core accountability mechanisms was inconsistent and lacked coherence; (2) the accountability mechanisms were ambiguous and unclear, and (3) the system's capacity hindered successful implementation of the mechanisms. The thesis findings emphasise two key dimensions of accountability: the human and institutional. The findings regarding the human dimension confirm that stakeholder involvement, capacity, and buy-in are important for enhancing accountability in any system. On the other hand, the institutional findings confirm that ambiguity of some accountability mechanisms, absence of clear plans, and inconsistent implementation hinder successful application of accountability mechanisms in educational systems. The recommendations call for more coherence in implementing current accountability mechanisms with more stakeholder engagement and capacity building at the school level.

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List of Abbreviations

- ENE: Education for a New Era
- MEHE: Ministry of Education and Higher Education
- NCLB: No Child Left Behind
- NCS: National Curriculum Standards
- NDS: National Development Strategy
- NPSTSL: National Professional Standards for Teachers and School Leaders.
- SEC: Supreme Education Council
- SAO: Student Assessment Office
- SRC: School Report Cards
- QCEA: Qatar Comprehensive Education Assessment
- QNEDS: Qatar National Education Data System
- QSSC: Qatar Senior School Certificate
- QCSS: Qatar Comprehensive School Survey

1. Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Thesis Topic

There is a global recognition of the need for equitable and efficient service provision, primarily in public service sectors like education and health (UNESCO, 2017; Baxter, Colledge and Turner, 2017; Takeda, Demas and Shibuya, 2014; Schillemans, Van Twist and Vanhommerig, 2013; World Bank, 2003). Countries' development efforts are dependent on the accountability relationships between service providers, policymakers, and service beneficiaries; placing great emphasis on accountability as a guiding principle for public institutions (World Bank, 2003). Moreover, there is an emphasis on accountability in public speeches, policy documents, and official discourse, especially as it is "the hallmark of modern democratic governance" (Bovens, 2005, p.182). International organisations such as the World Bank have promoted standardisation, decentralisation, and accountability in public services since the 1990s (UNESCO, 2017). According to Smith and Benavot (2019), UNESCO suggests that there is an increasing demand for accountability in response to the increased decentralisation, autonomy, and documentation in education.

Additionally, due to the technological revolution and open access to information, governments are seeking to promote accountability and transparency to earn the public's confidence (Schillemans, Van Twist and Vanhommerig, 2013; Bovens, 2010; Dubnick, 2002). For instance, effective accountability systems provide legitimacy to institutions, increase performance, and act as a mechanism for quality control (Bovens, 2010; Bovens, 2005). Besides, they guarantee to the public that government money and resources are allocated responsibly and that governments are worthy of the public trust (Supovitz, 2009). More specifically, accountability in an education system protects public funds from misuse, develops a committed pursue of educational goals by policymakers and stakeholders, and fosters a sense of public trust (UNESCO, 2017; Takeda, Demas and Shibuya, 2014; World Bank, 2003).

Regarding education, accountability is considered the cornerstone of new education policy, as it emphasises external monitoring of outcomes and results to drive improvements in educational service provision (Smith and Benavot, 2019). Recent educational reforms acknowledge the importance of accountability and are usually designed to target and strengthen accountability in monitoring schools (Takeda, Demas and Shibuya, 2014; Guarino and Tanner, 2012; Yan, 2019). Because accountability has proven to be immensely

fundamental to achieving educational goals when it is a means to education ends (UNESCO, 2017). Since education deals with the distribution and deployment of public resources, the type, approach, and accountability mechanisms used are vital to consider (Winter, 2017). It has been argued that the growing universal interest in improving students' academic outcomes and the quality of educational services increased monitoring and evaluation practices (Smith, 2017; Chapman and Snyder, 2000). As a result, accountability mechanisms that use students' achievement in standardised tests to enhance school performance are widely implemented in many countries (Smith, 2017; Smith, 2014; Ben Jaafar, 2011; Frymier, 1996; Perrone, 1977).

There are different approaches to accountability in education, including market, decentralisation, professional, and managerial (UNESCO, 2017; Takeda, Demas and Shibuya, 2014; Leithwood, 2005). All four approaches assume that an increase in accountability improves the learning of students and school performance. A survey of the literature indicates that the implementation of an accountability system in education requires the use of various mechanisms such as high-stakes testing (Smith, 2017; Russell, Madaus and Higgins, 2009; Perrone, 1977), external inspections (Ehren et al., 2013), the adoption and assessment of learning standards (Verger, Fontdevila and Parcerisa, 2019), and school self-evaluations (Hall, 2017) to name a few. It is often the case that most government accountability policies include various mechanisms (Leithwood, 2005; Levin, 1974).

In 2004, Qatar reformed its education system by adopting similar approaches promoted by international organisations such as standards-based accountability, autonomy, and new decentralised governance structures. Qatar's *Education for a New Era reform* (ENE) made radical changes in the way schools were governed and resulted in many changes that continue to impact how schools operate to this day. ENE was based on four pillars: autonomy, variety, choice, and accountability. Although three of the reform dimensions have faded, accountability has survived and is dominant in the Qatari education system. With that in mind, the thesis focuses on Qatar's experience in implementing accountability as a highly sought educational system principle.

1.2 The Significance of the Thesis

Education systems have recognised the need for accountability worldwide and have designed and implemented various apparatuses to ensure that accountability improved educational outcomes (Guarino and Tanner, 2012). However, research indicates there is no single best approach to accountability (UNESCO, 2017; Smith, 2017; Takeda, Demas and

Shibuya, 2014; Levin, 1974), and educational accountability is promoted globally in different ways to different extents (Winter, 2017). However, educational reform dimensions manifest differently depending on the countries' public administration traditions and their local context (Verger, Fontdevila and Parcerisa, 2019; Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit and Pittenger, 2014). Research reports that the various approaches to accountability in some educational contexts can be very effective, but in others, the approach could prove detrimental (UNESCO, 2017). According to Ball, Maguire and Braun (2011), educational policy and reforms are initiated at the national government level, and local administrators and schools are the ones that are expected to implement these reforms effectively. Consequently, policy implementation for accountability relies upon its stakeholders' sense-making abilities (Werts et al., 2013). Therefore, the thesis investigates how the Qatari government intended to implement accountability and how it was interpreted in schools. Also, it sheds light on the perceptions of stakeholders of accountability and their opinion regarding the mechanisms used to hold schools accountable following the (ENE) reform in Qatar.

Several dimensions demonstrate the significance of the thesis topic. Although there is an abundant amount of research on accountability in education in western contexts, there is insufficient recent literature and research on accountability in Qatar's education. For instance, there were two studies discussing accountability in Qatari schools that were published in the earlier stages of the reform. Both studies did not address some of the critical aspects of the topic, such as the applied accountability mechanisms and stakeholder perceptions of them. In their study about accountability in Qatari schools, Guarino and Tanner (2012) pointed out that the reform included an immediate establishment of a standardised testing program linked to international standards that enabled the new decentralised reform structure to evaluate the reform's progress. This dimension of the reform planted roots in Qatar’s education system for accountability and needed to be thoroughly investigated in light of international literature. Ben Jaafar (2011, p.597) studied Performance-Based Accountability in educational reform by examining the Qatari model of accountability. Ben Jaafar identified some of the policy inconsistencies in the Qatari context within the "structure, consequential intent, and expectations of professional involvement." However, the study did not cover other elements such as accountability mechanisms and stakeholder views. Therefore, the thesis focuses on the intended and actual accountability mechanisms in Qatari schools in light of related educational governance literature. Furthermore, the thesis explores stakeholders' perspectives regarding accountability and is the first to investigate Qatar's accountability since the ENE reform was rolled back.

The thesis also provides evidence from the Qatari context supported by literature about effective mechanisms for improving accountability in education systems. The comparison between policymakers' intentions and implementation covered in the thesis is also significant. They can help discover gaps between the intentions and actual practice and provide useful information for policymakers. These findings also provide insight into areas of further research in educational reform and accountability.

Finally, much of the literature is focused on one or two aspects of accountability in education, such as standardised testing and teacher evaluations; there is scarcity in the literature that investigates it from a broader lens. Thus, the thesis aims to address a gap that could benefit reformers and policymakers in designing comprehensive accountability reforms at the system level.

1.3 The Problem the Thesis Addresses

In 2001, Qatari leaders became alarmed about the country's educational system. According to Brewer et al., (2007), Qatar's education system was "not producing high-quality outcomes and was rigid, outdated, and resistant to reform" (p.iii). The RAND Corporation was contracted to complete a comprehensive review of Qatar's K-12 education system. RAND's analysis pointed to weaknesses and concerns including the lack of vision and mission, the rigid hierarchical organisational structure and top-down decisions, missing leadership, outdated and unchallenging curriculum, emphasis on rote memorisation, and the high rate of grade retention, among others (Brewer et al., 2007; Nasser, 2017; Zellman et al., 2011; Zellman et al., 2009). RAND's overall assessment was that the education system needed a large-scale reform and radical restructuring.

RAND offered Qatar several reform options that were inspired by different education models. The government decided to implement a decentralised charter school model, which resulted in the implementation of Independent schools. Also, RAND chose four pillars as the foundation of this model: “1) autonomy for schools, 2) accountability through a comprehensive assessment system, 3) variety in schooling alternatives, and 4) choice for parents, teachers, and school operators” (Romanowski, Abu-Shawish and Merouani, 2019, p.732). This led to the State of Qatar launching its large-scale educational initiative ENE that was designed to reform the country's public education in the early 2000s (Brewer et al., 2007). The reform consisted of various changes and planned to address all the challenges of the education system. Specifically, for the accountability pillar, the reform included new organisational structures, curriculum standards, national standardised assessments,

professional standards for teachers and school leaders, comprehensive education surveys and report cards, a teacher and school leader licensing system, and school evaluations.

Since its launch in 2004, Qatar's education system has moved away from the initial reform's intent (Nasser, 2017; Guarino and Tanner, 2012; Zellman et al., 2009). However, Guarino and Tanner (2012, p.221) argued that "many reform principles, though diluted, have been retained." Similarly, according to Nasser (2017), the pillar of accountability to a great extent remained intact, primarily because of the more significant centralised role of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). In light of global interest in and recognition of the importance of accountability, the thesis focuses on and unpacks accountability as a governing principle in education systems and its applications. It aims to answer a primary question about how accountability as a governing principle was implemented to hold Independent schools accountable in Qatar.

1.4 Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis is organised into six chapters; chapter one describes the importance of accountability, posits the research problem, and describes the study's significance. Chapter two provides relevant background material about Qatar as a country, including a concise history of Qatar's education system, information about Qatar's educational ENE reform, including the perceived benefits and shortcomings of the reform, and how accountability was defined and implemented since the reform. Chapter three reviews the literature and empirical evidence relevant to accountability in education. The chapter develops a complex definition of accountability and provides the benefits and challenges in its implementation, models, and approaches, all within education.

Chapter four describes the thesis's philosophical paradigm and methodological framework by providing information about the research design, methods, and procedures for data collection and analysis. It also offers a discussion about the trustworthiness and ethical aspects and considerations. Chapter five presents the data analysis results and the findings from the content analysis and the interviews to answer the research questions. Furthermore, the chapter provides evidence from the literature that supports the research findings. The sixth chapter offers several implications and recommendations for policymakers in Qatar and internationally. It also provides suggestions for future research.

2. Chapter Two: Contextual Background

2.1 Introduction

Qatar is a small country located in the Arabian Gulf, with a population of less than three million, and is the second-largest exporter of natural gas in the world. The country's economy is highly dependent on oil, gas, and an expatriate workforce (Planning and Statistics Authority, 2018). The country's economic growth has created a flow of high- and low-skilled expatriate workers creating a ratio of one national to nine foreign expatriates (Wittrock et al., 2017). Qatar's highly diverse and mobile population is due to the development projects in the petroleum sector and the World Cup 2022 projects. Aware of the reliance on hydrocarbons, Qatar's leadership planned to transition from a hydrocarbon-based to a knowledge-based economy (Khodr, 2011).

In 2008, Qatar launched its National Vision 2030 to achieve sustainable development and develop a knowledge-based economy for the country. The country intends to preserve its natural resources for generations to come. In doing so, it aims to ensure the well-being of all the people living in Qatar (Planning and Statistics Authority, 2018). Also, it intends to diversify its economy and ensure high living standards for all its citizens (Stasz et al., 2007).

Qatar's National Vision 2030 rests on four pillars: economic, social, environmental, and human development. Under each pillar comes a set of long-term goals that describe the future ambitions and address key challenges (Planning and Statistics Authority, 2008). According to Anderson, Alnaimi and Alhajri (2010), in terms of human development, Qatar aims to graduate a highly skilled workforce that contributes to the economic growth and sustainable development of the country.

Allocating a separate pillar for human development indicates the country's interest in investing in its human capital. The government recognises that the country's prosperity is highly dependent on the quality of its educational outcomes (Khodr, 2011). Hence, investment in formal education is essential for the growth of knowledge-based economies and the country's human capital (Salmi, 2003). This requires an effective primary, secondary, and tertiary education system (Olaniyan and Okemakinde, 2008). Therefore, education is one of the most important priorities in the country's plans, and the country continues to make massive investments in developing its schooling system (Stasz et al., 2007). According to Qatar's 2011-2016 National Development Strategy, attaining improved educational outcomes

is essential to fulfil the labour market's needs and support the country's economy. However, the strategy document stresses that the government needs to address students' low academic performance to do so (Planning and Statistics Authority, 2011).

2.2 The Start of Education in Qatar

Before the 1950s, children and adults in Qatar received education from Kuttab or Muttawa and the mosque. The Kuttab or Muttawa were literate adults who get paid to teach basic Arabic reading, writing, and numeracy skills (Ministry of Education, 2005; Brewer et al., 2007). Children and adults were also taught to recite the Holy Qu'ran and Islamic teachings by literate males and females in their homes or mosques (Brewer et al., 2007). To prepare the youth for the development happening after the oil discovery, the country opened its first school that offered formal education to boys in 1947. It was followed by establishing the second school in 1951 (Ministry of Education, 2005).

In 1956, the Ministry of Education was officially established in Qatar and was called Wizarat Al-Maarif. It was one of the country's first public service institutions (Ministry of Education, 2005; Al-Fadala, 2015). The Ministry's primary role was to offer free public education to all children, both boys and girls. To attract students, the Ministry offered several incentives that included: monthly financial rewards, free food, clothes, and transportation, among other things (Ministry of Education, 2005). As witnessed in many countries, both Arabic and Non-Arabic, the emphasis was mainly on learning the basic literacy and numeracy skills through rote memorisation, with little focus on developing problem-solving and critical thinking skills at this stage (Al-Fadala, 2015). Back then, the government's main purpose was to eliminate illiteracy with little consideration to quality at the time (Nasser, 2017). Initially, the country used the Egyptian curriculum, and the textbooks were imported from Egypt and other Arabian countries (Al-Fadala, 2015). In 1962, the country developed plans to design its national curriculum, and by 1970 the locally designed curriculum was implemented (Ministry of Education, 2005).

Since its establishment, the Ministry witnessed consistent growth and gradually developed its policies and services. More schools opened and enrolment rates were increasing. In 1961, the Ministry held annual summits with school principals, teachers, and education officials to develop and review its policies and governing procedures (Ministry of Education, 2005). Additionally, during that era, the country witnessed the inception of its first

national university in 1977 to address higher education needs in the country (Qatar University, 2019).

During the 1970s and 1980s, the country attempted many reforms to improve its basic education and decrease illiteracy rates (Nasser, 2017); however, the education system lacked vision and direction (Nasser, 2017; Al-Banai and Nasser, 2015). By the 1990s, the Ministry of Education had made progress in providing free basic education for all children. It established the infrastructures and provided schools with the needed human resources (Brewer et al., 2007). The government schools had well-paid and trained national teachers, textbooks, and transportation for students. Also, some initiatives were implemented to improve the students' learning experience including the introduction of technology in the classrooms, new secondary (high) school options, and improved school libraries. Moreover, Qatari teachers had job security and some professional advancement opportunities (Zellman et al., 2009). Qatar followed the British schooling structure that consisted of three stages of general education that include primary stage (grades 1-6), preparatory (grades 7-9), and secondary (grades 10-12). Besides, all government schools were segregated by gender (Al-Banai and Nasser, 2015).

During the 1990s, there were some growing concerns regarding the quality of education provided by government schools (Al-Banai and Nasser, 2015; Al-Kubaisi, 1999). Schools were crammed with students due to the population increases (Al-Banai and Nasser, 2015). There were also high turnover rates among expat teachers due to decreasing their salaries (Al-Kubaisi, 1999). The biggest concern was the lack of motivation and students' low academic achievement (Brewer et al., 2007; Al-Kubaisi, 1999). The system's challenges intensified with time and many educators called for system-level improvements (Al-Kubaisi, 1999). Despite the efforts made in the provision of basic education, there was minimal impact on the quality of students' learning outcomes (Al-Banai and Nasser, 2015; Brewer et al., 2007). To develop its education, the government made repeated attempts to reform its education in 1990, 1996, and 1997. In the previous three comprehensive reform trials, the former Ministry of Education contracted local educators, external experts, and international organisations that included UNESCO and UNDP (Al-Kubaisi, 2011). The reform attempts failed due to the lack of clarity, political support, sufficient funding, and local human capacity (Al-kubaisi, 1999). However, all the system reform attempts highlighted common issues and challenges in the country’s schooling system that needed immediate large-scale interventions. The challenges highlighted during the former reform efforts included: old and insufficient

school buildings, lack of qualified teachers, low student motivation, traditional instructional practices, and unequipped school science laboratories (Al-Kubaisi, 2011; Al-Kubaisi, 1999).

2.3 Education for a New Era Reform

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the outcomes of the country's education system worried the Qatari government, mainly since the system was not able to produce the desired outcomes required for the country's development (Al-Kubaisi, 1999; Brewer et al., 2007). Therefore, the Qatari leaders realised that it needed to develop its outdated and rigid education system for Qatar to achieve its economic and social development plans (Weber, 2011; Brewer et al., 2007).

Qatar's former Emir, His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, sought RAND Corporation, a renowned consulting company, to conduct a comprehensive review of Qatar's education. The company was requested to recommend a new education model with its governing structures to improve the country's educational outcomes (Al-Fadala, 2015). Additionally, the country aimed to invest more in initiatives that foster scientific research and innovation (Gonzalez, et al., 2009). In the early 2000s, RAND conducted a thorough review of Qatar's education system along with a large number of high-profile Qatari and non-Qatari experts and educators. RAND visited public schools and collected comprehensive data and information about schools from focus groups and interviews with key stakeholders such as teachers, principals, parents, and students (Brewer et al., 2007). RAND's report identified two priorities: the importance of devising a comprehensive plan to address system gaps, and the development of a standards-based model to improve the system's different components (Nasser, 2017).

Among the weaknesses identified in RAND's review of the Qatari schooling system were: (1) the lack of effective governing structures and procedures in a highly centralised system, (2) the absence of a shared vision and indicators for quality, (3) the little financial support for schools infrastructure and professional development, and finally (4) the little use of students' learning data and information to support policy decision-making (Brewer et. al., 2007). Additionally, the Qatari education system was rigid, inflexible, and did not provide students with enough opportunities that foster creativity and innovation (Weber, 2011). Moreover, the decision-making process was not clear and schools usually adhered to top-down decisions (Nasser, 2017). Although the system had many advantages, it was clear that there were no policies for incentivising good schools and holding all schools to account to

promote good performance. It was believed that the identified challenges needed a large-scale reform to address all of them successfully (Al-Kubaisi, 1999; Brewer et. al., 2007).

RAND proposed three different models: (1) a modified centralised model, (2) a voucher model, and (3) a charter school model (Table 1). After discussions, the decision was that the charter schools model would enable the system to achieve its intended outcomes. The new model offered schools the freedom to make decisions regarding the financial resources allocation, teaching practices, curriculum design, and staffing. Schools would be given more autonomy to be creative and consequently, they would receive incentives for their good performance. It was believed that more autonomy would promote variety and choice for the parents. Moreover, the schools would be more responsible for their actions and make the right choices for their students. Adopting a voucher system model meant more decentralisation that required dramatic changes in the governing structures and the system's capacity (Brewer et al., 2007; Zellman et al., 2009).

Table 1. Summary of Qatar education reform design models (Brewer et al., 2007, p.52)

	Design Option		
Dimension	Modified Centralised Model	Charter School Model	Voucher Model
Variety	No change to current system	Potential for wide variety	Potential for wide variety
Authority	Ministry makes most decisions; schools have some discretion on instructional matters; limited parental choice	Limited government oversight; most decisions made at school level; parental choice	Parental choice; most decisions made at school level
Incentives	Principals have authority to hire and fire teachers	Charter holders have freedom to innovate; parental choice motivates school performance	Parental choice motivates school performance
Monitoring	More frequent and extensive student testing; proper evaluation of new initiatives	More frequent and extensive student testing; charter specifies conditions of compliance and performance; performance information publically available	More frequent and extensive student testing; performance information publicly available; government role greatly reduced

In 2003, the new model for the schooling system was agreed upon by the Qatari officials and immediately the work began. Innovative and qualified Qataris (not necessarily educators) were invited to apply as operators for the new government-funded Independent schools under agreed contracts (Zellman et al., 2009). The new school operators were accountable to students and their parents, given that funding was allocated based on the number of students in the school (Brewer et. al, 2007).

> "Adopting a Charter School Model in Qatar would be much riskier than implementing a Modified Centralised Model and would require significant behavioural change on the part of many constituents" (Brewer et. al., 2007, p.54).

RAND acknowledged from the beginning that the prior Ministry was used to being in control and making centralised decisions in terms of governing schools. Hence, it was crucial to develop a new governing body to take up the new role smoothly. That new body would be staffed with officials who were forward-thinking and believed in the approach designed by RAND. The efforts to reform Qatar's education started with establishing the Supreme Education Council (based on the Emiri Decree No. 37 2002) to substitute the previous Ministry of Education at the beginning of 2002 (Zellman et al., 2009). The Supreme Education Council (SEC) aimed to take up a lot of efforts to direct the country's new schooling system and improve its outcomes (Brewer et al., 2007).

The reform education model rested on four guiding principles: variety, choice, autonomy, and accountability (Brewer et. al., 2007). These concepts were introduced with the launch of the reform. It has been argued that the ENE reform was built according to the principles highly sought by the international community such as equity, accountability, autonomy, and transparency (Guarino and Tanner, 2012). According to RAND, the reform's elements embodied effective reform designs seen internationally (Zellman et al., 2009).

The SEC initially had three main institutes: the Education Institute, the Evaluation Institute, and the Higher Education Institute. RAND intended through the new structure to decrease the bureaucracy witnessed in the former Ministry, and "the reliance on rules and hierarchy" (Brewer et al., 2007, p.xxi). It also aimed by developing mandates to increase work efficiency. Employees working in the SEC were expected to be collaborative, creative, proactive, and personally accountable for achieving the results intended for the system

(Brewer et al., 2007). RAND proposed leaner and more inter-dependent operations for the departments to fulfil their roles. The new structure gave the office directors more autonomy to achieve intended targets within the assigned budgets, given they be accountable for results. The new structure was intended to encourage individuals to make decisions, take initiative, and solve problems (Zellman et al., 2009).

Since its establishment, the SEC began a phased implementation of the new reform plans. It was operating alongside the former Ministry of Education since its establishment (Al-Ammri, 2012). RAND indicated the importance of the complete coordination and alignment between the SEC and the Ministry as the reform plans were unfolding (Zellman et al., 2009). Starting in 2004, the reform was fully implemented over three overlapping stages. The first phase of the reform began developing infrastructures and policies needed for the proper kick-off. The first generation of Independent schools opened in 2004, along with the establishment of the Education and Evaluation institutes (Al-Fadala, 2015). In 2003/2004, there were 216 government schools with more than 74,500 students and 10,319 teachers (Ministry of Education, 2005). The first cohort of Independent schools consisted of 12 schools. By 2006, 46 schools were converted into Independent schools operating along with other government schools and private schools (Zellman et al., 2009). Between 2004 and 2008, more Independent schools opened and other government schools gradually converted to Independent schools following the new decentralised model. Meanwhile, the majority of the government schools were still administered by the previous Ministry of Education. In 2009, all schools converted into independent status after the approval of the Qatari leadership of the new model (Al-Fadala, 2015).

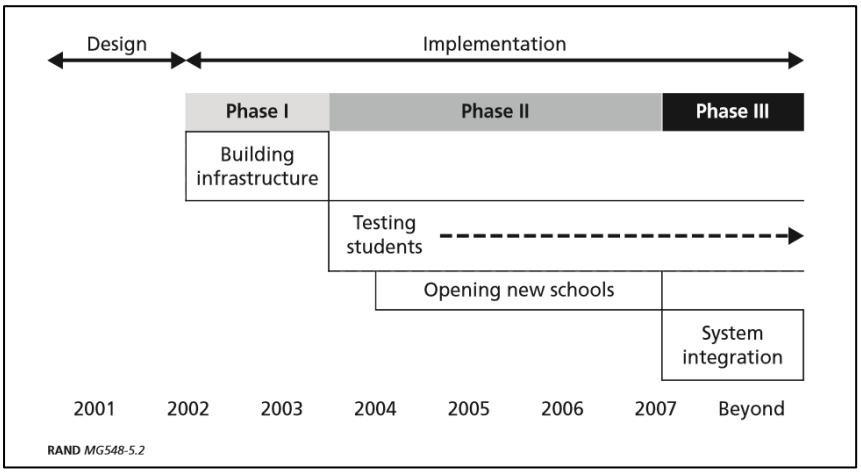

Figure 1. Timeline of the reform implementation phases, (Brewer et al., 2007, p.81)

As illustrated in figure (1), the duration of the first phase for building the reform infrastructures took a little over a year after approving RAND's recommendations (Nasser, 2017).

2.4 Accountability Before the Reform

In RAND's review of the education system in Qatar, accountability was not fully implemented. Although all teachers were accountable for delivering the centralised curriculum designed by the former Ministry of Education, schools and teachers were not held accountable for their students' performance (Brewer et al., 2007). Moreover, school performance was not linked to students' learning outcomes and schools did not have annual targets. RAND also reported that "teachers and administrators had no sense of whether they were increasing the students' knowledge or improving their skills." (Brewer et al., 2007, p.40). That was due to the minimal use of student data and evidence for performance monitoring and planning. Moreover, there was little utilisation of electronic advancements to analyse, process, and publish schools' performance data (Al-Kubaisi, 1999).

2.5 Standards-Based Accountability in Independent Schools

RAND proposed a standards-based schooling system, which operated based on standards and performance measures for quality. As indicated in their reports (Zellman et al., 2009; Brewer et al., 2007), RAND developed the new standards-based model for Qatar's education to primarily achieve the following: (1) produce reliable and credible information to schools about students' academic performance to inform the system improvement efforts; (2) develop flexible assessments that link directly to clearly defined learning standards to support teachers in making instructional adjustments; and (3) provide timely and transparent reports for all stakeholders to support planning, decision-making, and choice to enhance accountability in the system (Zellman et al., 2009; Brewer et al., 2007).

It was believed that a standards-based model would allow the system to measure the performance of its various components based on agreed indicators that were socially sought and internationally benchmarked (Gonzalez, et al., 2009). Additionally, the new model would

facilitate the implementation of the four principles of the reform and improve its performance (Zellman et al., 2009; Brewer et al., 2007).

International (primarily western) practices were highly sought in the ENE reform's planning and implementation phases. Private organisations, both local and international, were encouraged to manage the operations of the newly established Independent schools (Nasser, 2017). Therefore, the government contracted many international education companies to plan and implement the new model's proposed initiatives. Below are some of the main components of the standards-based model that were implemented in Independent schools:

i. The National Curriculum Standards (NCS) were designed to focus on 21st-century skills and enhance instructional practices emphasising teaching Maths, English, and Science than other subjects (Weber, 2011). The SEC's Education Institute hired several distinguished international curriculum experts to prepare the standards under the supervision of local education experts. The working teams consisted of teachers and Qatari curriculum experts that ensured the alignment of the standards with Qatari values and culture (Al-Meghrabi, 2007).
ii. The implementation of national-level standardised assessments that were linked to the curriculum standards. The assessments were aligned to international evaluation practices to measure students' attainment and monitor their performance over time (Gonzalez, et al., 2009). The Qatar Comprehensive Education Assessments (QCEA) were paper-based summative assessments that were conducted annually at the end of the academic year. The assessments were developed to provide "a common measure of student proficiency according to the new standards set by Supreme Education Council" (Supreme Education Council, 2008, p.3). The QCEA assessments were a part of Qatar's Student Assessment System (QSAS); a more comprehensive system that included both formative and summative assessments (Zellman et al., 2009).
iii. The development of the National Professional Standards for Teachers and School Leaders (NPSTSL) to promote professional conduct and focus on creative pedagogical practices (Zellman et al., 2009). The professional standards were developed by a western consulting company that worked on the initiative at its early stages (Romanowski and Amatullah, 2014). The NPSTSL described the skills and competencies of effective teachers and school leaders (Supreme Education Council, 2007c). The design and implementation of the professional standards aimed to improve school-level practices (Romanowski and Amatullah, 2014).

iv. The participation in international assessments such as PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS for progress review and benchmarking purposes (Brewer et al., 2007).
v. The introduction of new management elements for the modified schools model that included: school operators, school contracts, and finance formula for funding (Zellman et al., 2009).

The companies contracted for planning and executing the components of the standards-based model were mainly from the United States, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand (Al-Ammri, 2012). RAND played a leading role in developing the contracts and choosing the companies for some of the reform's major projects (Al-Ammri, 2012; Gonzalez et al., 2009). At the time, there was an "appetite to increase foreign ways" because it was believed to be modern and efficient (Al-Banai and Nasser, 2015, p.679).

The SEC and Independent schools were expected to take full responsibility for their performance and be entirely accountable for the results (Brewer et. al., 2007). According to the SEC, adopting accountability as a guiding principle for the reform aimed to achieve several goals: (1) monitor school performance on an ongoing basis; (2) assure responsible use of the given authority to schools; (3) build the confidence of the school community to act autonomously and develop their schools; and (4) facilitate continuous learning and improvement (Al-Aji, 2008).

Independent schools would be held accountable by the government through two mechanisms. First, schools would apply for Independent status and enter into a contractual arrangement. Regular audits and reporting mechanisms would be used to monitor compliance. Second, schools would be evaluated regularly through a set of measures, including and not restricted to standardised student assessments (Brewer et al., 2007). At the time, accountability rested on primarily two things: school choice and fiscal auditing (Guarino and Tanner, 2012). The results of the reviews and assessments about the schools would be made available to all interested parties and summarised for each school to inform parental choice. In this way, parents could judge for themselves whether the educational approach and results satisfied their childrens' needs (Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2019a). Consequently, schools might close either through irregularities that the contracting authority deemed unacceptable or lack of enrolment (Timpane et al., 2001). According to earlier research, there were several mechanisms that were implemented to promote accountability during the ENE reform as shown below.

i. ***New governing structures*:** The SEC's structure aimed to substitute the bureaucracies of the previous Ministry and encourage agile management practices using data and evidence; it was designed to "break the government monopoly on the operation of schools" (Brewer et al., 2007, p.55). For instance, the Evaluation Institute was established to monitor all schools' performance and provide objective yearly report cards to parents on the quality of the performance of their child's school (Zellman et al., 2009). RAND indicated that "to be credible, this body should be independent from those that contract with or provide support to schools." (Brewer et al., 2007, p.66). The offices of the Evaluation Institute were designed to conduct objective evaluations at three levels: students, teachers/ school leaders, and schools.

ii. ***National curriculum standards*:** The NCS provided the guiding blueprints for Independent schools to develop their curriculum materials and steer their instructional practices accordingly (Brewer et al., 2007). Qatar received recognition and appraisal for the development of the curriculum standards (Zellman et al., 2009). It was believed that the "curriculum standards are the foundation for teaching, learning, and accountability" (Brewer et. al., 2007, p. xxiv); and that they were "at the centre of educational reform in Qatar" (Al- Emadi et al., 2012, p.7). According to the former director of the Education Institute, the standards aimed to ensure high levels of performance from all students in Qatar; and success required that all stakeholders implement them (Al- Meghrabi, 2007).

iii. ***National standardised assessments***: A new students' assessment policy was developed to align with the new curriculum standards (Brewer et. al., 2007). The QCEA was first implemented in Maths, Science, English and Arabic in 2004, with the help of RAND, external subject matter experts, and external western contractors (Gonzalez, et al., 2009). RAND recommended implementing the standardised assessments in Independent and Arabic private schools. Their primary purpose was to be used for benchmarking students' performance and monitor schools' progress. The assessments would also be helpful to identify student needs for improvement purposes. (Zellman et al., 2009; Gonzalez et al., 2009). In 2007, official documents explicitly confirmed that the QCEA was implemented by an objective and an external entity (the Evaluation Institute) to hold Independent schools accountable for their performance (Ben Jafaar, 2011). The QCEA was the most comprehensive and largest in scope of the QSAS, which contained both formative and summative assessments administered at both the school and system levels (Zellman et al., 2009).

iv. ***The Qatar Senior School Certificate****:* The Qatar Senior School Certificate (QSSC) assessments were exit exams used to grant a graduation certificate for grade twelve students in Independent schools (Ben Jafaar, 2011). The student test results were developed at an individual student level and contained other information that was intended to provide students with a comprehensive profile of their performance (Ben Jafaar, 2011). Grade twelve assessments were published annually in a symposium that brings all school principals and SEC officials together (Supreme Education Council, 2009a).

v. ***Comprehensive education surveys and report cards:*** The SEC conducted its first annual Qatar Comprehensive School Survey (QCSS) in 2004 to get more qualitative information about the quality of Independent schools and the levels of satisfaction of key stakeholders. The survey targeted students, parents, teachers, and school leaders in the newly opened Independent schools (Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2019a). All the surveys were initially designed by foreign companies in English and later were translated into Arabic by local translators (Wittrock et.al., 2017). They included questions about the curriculum, teaching and learning practices, computers, and technology inside the classroom. The surveys also aimed to elicit the stakeholder views about the school climate, professional development, and parental involvement (Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2019a). Results were annually issued in the School Report Cards (SRC) and contained valuable quantitative and qualitative information about the schools' performance. It was believed that the report cards would increase the communication between parents and schools, and encourage good interaction between parents, teachers, and school leaders (Zellman et al., 2009). According to the SEC, the SRC served the realisation of three of the reform principles. It was believed that the SRC would enable parents to choose based on the variety of schooling options, and ultimately hold schools accountable for their performance (Supreme Education Council, 2007a).

vi. ***Teachers and school leaders licensing system****:* The introduction of the Qatari licensure system in 2008 was a key initiative towards more monitoring and holding educators accountable for conduct against a prescribed set of expectations and standards (Ellili-Cherif, Romanowski and Nasser, 2012). The system aimed to provide formal proof of the quality of teachers and school leaders working in Independent schools; and bring all teachers working in Independent schools to a comparable level (Romanowski and Amatullah, 2014).

vii. ***School evaluation****:* The School Evaluation Office in the Evaluation Institute was responsible for evaluating the school's performance following a criteria that align with

international practices. The school's performance indicators focused on school leadership, teaching and learning, and parental involvement (Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2019b).

RAND affirmed in their early reports that "no single assessment would suffice" (Gonzalez et al., 2009, p.10). Therefore, it was recommended that the new system include more components to provide a comprehensive and accurate picture of the students' progress (Brewer et al., 2007).

2.6 Results of the Education for a New Era Reform

> "The goal for the new system was to improve education in Qatar by generating a variety of schooling alternatives—with different missions, curricula, pedagogy, and resource allocation models—and then to hold schools accountable for quality through the provision of information about schools, parental choice, and minimal government oversight."
>
> (Brewer et al., 2007, p.58)

The new model received high-level political support, and naturally, that accompanied massive investment in both financial and human resources to help unfold the reform objectives (Gonzalez et al., 2009). Despite the reform leaders' excitement, there was a lot of scepticism among the public regarding how the system would achieve its very ambitious objectives (Al-Ammri, 2012; Al-Kubaisi, 2011). Early studies of the educational reforms in Qatar suggested that the ENE reform positively impacted some aspects of the schooling system (Alfadala, 2015; Anderson, Alnaimi, and Alhajri, 2010; Zellman et al., 2009; Al-Aji, 2008). Increased focus on innovation, scientific research, and teacher training were among the system's enhanced practices. On the other hand, the Qatari education reform had several negative consequences that included the loosely defined governance mechanisms, lack of clarity, increased workload on teachers, and the constant changes in policies.

2.6.1 Positive Impacts of Education for a new era reform

Early studies that investigated the ENE reform and its impacts suggested that there were a number of positive gains from the reform on the overall performance of the schooling

system in Qatar. They include improved instructional practices, a focus on innovation, new data reporting systems, and targeted teacher professional development as discussed below.

i. ***The implementation of a comprehensive standards-based education system:*** The country implemented the NCS, a set of internationally benchmarked learning standards for Maths, Science, English and Arabic. The standards provided the blueprint for what students are expected to learn and levels of proficiency to fulfill the country's ambitious vision (Al-Emadi et al., 2015, p. 7). Many of the SEC policies and procedures supported the realisation of the NCS; and the standards guided instruction, curriculum design, assessment, and teacher performance management (Al-Banai and Nasser, 2015).

ii. ***More focus on creativity and innovation:*** The new NCS focused on important skills such as analysis, critical thinking, and problem-solving. It also emphasised innovation, inquiry, and research in all the subjects (Alfadala, 2015; Anderson, Alnaimi and Alhajri, 2010). Additionally, the reform encouraged innovation and creativity among students, as evident in their increased participation in the Student Scientific Research Fair that began in 2009 (Anderson, Alnaimi and Alhajri, 2010). Moreover, the increased autonomy encouraged school principals and teachers to be more creative in developing their instructional practices and curriculum materials (Al-Ethawi and Al-Kuwari, 2018).

iii. ***Enhanced teacher training opportunities*****:** Teachers working in Independent schools had more hands-on professional development that was provided by international experts; the modified professional development reinforced good instructional practices such as reflection and practice critique (Al-Banai and Nasser, 2015; Alfadala, 2015; Zellman et al., 2009; Anderson, Alnaimi and Alhajri, 2010). Moreover, the implementation of the NPSTSL improved educators' skills and understanding of issues relating to quality and professional educational practice (Romanowski and Amatullah, 2014). Besides, high-quality professional development programs were designed according to the professional standards for both teachers and school leaders (Zellman et al., 2009). Several foreign companies known as School Support Organizations (SOS) were assigned to support the new Independent schools mostly to deal with the curriculum standards, classroom instruction, school management, and planning (Al-Banai and Nasser, 2015).

iv. ***Enhanced evaluation and reporting systems:*** The reform enhanced the evaluation and student assessment systems in the country (Alfadala, 2015). In 2004, the country implemented its first standardised national assessment for all the grades in Independent schools and Arabic private schools. Later, the QCEA results were used as the baseline for annual report cards

issued by the SEC in 2006 (Al-Ammri, 2012). The SEC adopted advanced data collection and reporting mechanisms as part of the new reform's structure. The reports contained qualitative and quantitative information for parents and schools to help them follow students' academic progress and guide teachers' practice (Gonzalez et al., 2009; Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2019b).

v. ***Improved instructional practices:*** The investments made in teacher development encouraged student-centred instructional practices in Independent schools. Comparisons made between teaching practices in Independent schools versus government schools revealed that lessons were more interactive and engaging in Independent schools (Zellman et al., 2009; Al-Banai and Nasser, 2015).

vi. ***Improved literacy rates:*** There was a commitment to provide quality educational services for all and raise the quality of early years' literacy and adults' learning programs. According to Anderson, Alnaimi, and Alhajri (2010), the ENE reform contributed positively to developing the country's outcomes, mainly in literacy rates (approaching 100%).

2.6.2 Shortcomings of Education for a New Era

Regardless of the massive investments in the reform initiatives, the outcomes did not meet the ambitious expectations as intended by RAND (Al-Banai and Nasser, 2015; Al-Ammri, 2012; Zellman et al., 2009). Moreover, Qatar's results in the PISA 2012 after eight years of the reform implementation provoked many mixed opinions regarding the ENE reform effectiveness. Despite the improved results from the PISA scores in 2006, Qatar was still below the average in comparison to students' scores internationally (Al-Emadi et al., 2015). The low achievement of students in Qatari schools remained a core issue in the first and second National Development Strategies (NDS). For instance, the 2011-2016 NDS document indicated the importance of addressing the low achievement of Qatari students in core subjects at all levels. Also, the strategy highlighted the importance of investing in the reform principles, especially accountability and choice by adopting initiatives that increase parental involvement to inform student achievement (Planning and Statistics Authority, 2011). Similarly, the 2018-2022 strategy emphasised the low student performance in both national and international assessments, and the limited progress achieved in the first strategy due to lack of monitoring, follow-up, and accountability (Planning and Statistics Authority, 2018). Some of the main reasons for the downfalls of the ENE reform as highlighted in literature and the NDS documents are discussed below.

i. ***Rapid implementation*:** The reform leaders did not consider the importance of sufficient orientation for the schools and the community regarding the new changes. The planning phase was too short, and there was little consideration to the risks and possible implementation failures (Al- Ammri, 2012; Al- Kubaisi, 2011; Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, 2015). It has been argued that the time allocated to develop and implement the new system's governing policies and procedures was not reasonable. The implementation was rushed; resulting in many gaps in the design that caused implementation challenges (Al-Ammri, 2012; Nasser, 2017). For instance, SEC officials called for implementing the standardised assessments in the first year of the reform, which caused challenges to RAND's team and test developers due to the short time frame. Moreover, the Student Assessment Office (SAO) was under-resourced, and there were only three staff members working in the office at the time (Gonzalez et al., 2009). According to RAND reports, the development of the national assessments was done "in a less-than-ideal timeline" (Gonzalez et al., 2009, p. 38).

ii. ***Constant changes*:** The inconsistent implementation of the intended reform plans and the constant changes in policies hindered steady progress and fulfilment of reform plans. Consequently, that inconsistency triggered feelings of uncertainty and worry among schools and parents (Zellman et al., 2009; Guarino and Tanner, 2012; Al-Ethawi and Al-Kuwari, 2018). The constant changes did more harm than good and diluted the original reform design (Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, 2015). In the first two years, the reform was at its most vulnerable state against the criticism and concerns of educators and parents because many changes were introduced (Guarino and Tanner, 2012).

iii. ***Lack of transparency:*** At the beginning of the reform, most of the officials were completely busy implementing the reform's ambitious and demanding projects. Therefore, they could not interact effectively with schools and parents to communicate the reform goals (Al-Ammri, 2012; Al-Kubaisi, 2011). There was little consideration for the public's needs in the design and implementation of many big reform projects. The majority of parents surveyed in Al-Ammri's study agreed that the reform's philosophy, aims, and strategies were ambiguous (Al-Ammri, 2012). Similarly, teachers and principals in Al-Fadala's study expressed the lack of clarity of the SEC's policies and procedures which made their job complicated and frustrating (Al-Fadala, 2014).

iv. ***Difficulty of adapting to the changes required*:** There was a heavy reliance on external western consulting companies and concepts that did not interact successfully with the Qatari context (Nasser, 2017; Romanowski and Amatullah, 2014; Al-Ammri, 2012). One of the many challenges western agencies faced working on the Qatari reform was contextualising

programmes and policies implemented in western contexts. For example, western principles and values, such as participation and critical thinking were challenging to embed in a context that valued didactic and rigid practices (McNiff and McCourt, 2010). Moreover, educators were frustrated to implement imported western initiatives that had little consideration for the local context and their needs (Romanowski, 2014). Al-Ammri argued that the system must derive its principles and aims from the community itself for any reform to be successful. She argued that "importing or cloning" policies and frameworks from other countries did more harm than good to the system (Al-Ammri, 2012, p.70).

v. ***Increased workload*:** School leaders reported an increase in their workload and responsibilities due to the high reform expectations (Al-Fadala, 2014). Similarly, schools complained that the implementation of the new professional standards required more documentation and reporting which burdened teachers and school leaders (Romanowski and Amatullah, 2014). Workload related to the curriculum design, teaching requirements, and administrative tasks was one of the most significant drivers for high turnover rates and early retirement among Qatari teachers (Al-Ammri, 2007; Al-Banai and Nasser, 2015; Nasser, 2017). Al-Ammri's study revealed that teachers felt frustrated for being obliged by school operators to do more administrative tasks that distracted them from focusing on teaching (Al-Ammri, 2007).

vi. ***Increased reliability on expats:*** The ambiguity of the reform's plans and policies had forced many of the experienced Qatari educators to leave the education sector or apply for early retirement (Al-Ammri, 2007; Al-Ammri, 2012). Some Independent school operators looked for lower-pay expat teachers to replace the nationals regardless of their experience and qualifications (Al-Kubaisi, 2011). The Qatari teachers felt alienated in their schools and frustrated by the unlimited authority of school operators (Al-Ammri, 2007).

vii. ***Lack of coherence and consistency*:** It was inevitable due to the increased autonomy that there were inconsistent practices inside schools. It meant that it was up to the school operator to lead their school, which resulted in varying quality levels in schools. In the absence of clear guiding philosophy and frameworks, the Qatari schools became "isolated islands" (Al-Kubaisi, 2011, p.4). The inconsistency did not stop at the school level; it was evident that the SEC structure hampered effective communication and liaison between the Education and Evaluation Institutes (Zellman et al., 2009). For example, the Evaluation Institute assessments were not fully aligned with the curriculum standards administered by the Education Institute (Gonzalez et al., 2009).

A study conducted by Ben Jaafar in 2011 assessed accountability in Qatar's education using a performance-based accountability framework that focused on five dimensions: test structure, standard-setting, use of results, reporting, and professional involvement (p.599). Ben Jaafar argued that although the standardised assessments were intended to inform policymaking and improvement plans in Qatari schools, in reality, schools' performance data was moderately used or acted upon by officials working in the SEC. Also, Independent schools did not effectively utilise their performance data to change their programs and improve their teaching practices. He indicated that Qatar's evaluation system provided student performance reports at various levels that could support schools, teachers, parents, and policymakers. However, the system's overall capacity affected the implementation of many of the accountability mechanisms in Qatar. Moreover, there was a lack of proper stakeholder involvement in the design and implementation of many of the accountability mechanisms.

Similar findings to Ben Jafaar's study (2011) were highlighted in the 2018- 2022 NDS document regarding the challenges that hindered the successful implementation of the reform and the first NDS 2011-2016. The challenges included: (1) the low use of data and evidence in monitoring and decision-making, (2) the low capacity of human resources working in the SEC, and (3) the lack of stakeholder involvement in the reform initiatives (Planning and Statistics Authority, 2018).

2.7 The End of the Education for a New Era Reform

The ENE suffered tremendously from the criticism and complaints from teachers, school principals, and parents (Al-Ammri, 2012; Al-Kubaisi, 2011). It was surprising that among all the previous reform efforts, the aims and goals of the ENE reform were wholeheartedly and rapidly adopted without consideration for the country's historical and cultural context. Abandoning the accumulated experience of the former Ministry of Education over the past 50 years was not wise (Al-Kubaisi, 2011). Many educators felt that the reform and all its policies were imposed to replace a carefully structured and reliable system (Al-Ammri, 2012). Every year, the SEC practiced more control over schools and retrieved old ways of governing schools (Al-Ethawi and Al-Kuwari, 2018).

In response to the public's increasing demands, the SEC was abolished in 2016 after twelve years of implementation and replaced by the Ministry of Education and Higher

Education. The belief was more control by the government meant more security and consistency (Al-Kubaisi, 2011). The new structure retained some of the SEC's divisions and offices. The new structure has five main 'sectors': Education, Evaluation, Private Schools, Higher Education, and Shared Services to accommodate the increasing number of schools in Qatar (Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2019c). However, the Ministry was again officially responsible for staffing, curriculum design, budgeting, and teacher development (Al-Banai and Nasser, 2015). In 2018, there were 199 government schools and 277 private schools that accommodate more than 300,000 students (Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2020).

Qatar's experience in reforming its education system is unique, rich, exceptional, and the first in the region (Ben Jaafar, 2011). However, managing the change that accompanied the large-scale reform was challenging (Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, 2015). System-wide reform was not an easy task, and Qatar's reform needed to be gradually implemented and objectively evaluated at every stage for improvement (Al-Ammri, 2012).

2.8 Conclusion

Qatar's education has taken massive risks in the past two decades by introducing many consequent changes, and Qatar's ENE reform was unique and "politically sensitive" (Anderson, Alnaimi and Alhajri, 2010, p.247). Since the start of the reform in 2004, much has changed, yet there is no doubt that the foundations of a standards-based education structure intended by RAND were retained (Guarino and Tanner, 2012). Practices that embody autonomy, choice, and variety have almost disappeared; however, accountability remained a key component in Qatar's education today (Al-Banai and Nasser, 2015). Therefore, the research focuses on accountability as a guiding principle that inspired a standards-based reform and how it was employed in Qatari schools. Moreover, the research highlights applications and implications of accountability from an institutional lens to provide insightful analysis regarding the shortfalls and ways to address them.

3. Chapter Three: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

> "Faced with education challenges, the public wants to know who is responsible and policymakers look for urgent solutions. Increased accountability often tops the list."
>
> (UNESCO, 2017, p.xii)

Accountability is highly valued and pursued universally (UNESCO, 2017; Baxter, Colledge and Turner, 2017; Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit and Pittenger, 2014; Schillemans, Van Twist and Vanhommerig, 2013; World Bank, 2003). According to the World Bank, holding service providers accountable for equitable service provision usually generates good results, and promotes a good sense of responsibility (World Bank, 2003). Also, it conveys that governments are trustworthy and transparent to the public (Dubnick, 2002). Thus, there is an increased emphasis on accountability in public and political discourse, making it the "age of accountability", according to Hopmann (2008, p. 418).

Similarly, education systems worldwide acknowledge the importance of improving school accountability to improve their outcomes and the quality of students' performance (UNESCO, 2017; Smith, 2017; Takeda, Demas and Shibuya, 2014; Guarino and Tanner, 2012; Figlio and Loeb, 2011). It is considered "a means of achieving specific ends in education" (UNESCO, 2017, p.3) and a fundamental characteristic of democratic societies and public sector governance (Verger and Parcerisa, 2017; Bovens, 2005). However, as a term excessively used, its popularity undermines its importance (Dubnick, 2002, p.1).

This chapter provides an overview of accountability as a governing principle implemented in many education systems worldwide. It discusses the term from both business and education literature to provide a conceptual framework that clarifies its meaning and what it encompasses when implemented. The chapter begins with a broad view of the term and discusses the various definitions and applications from the literature. Then, the review will narrow the term's discussion to provide clear-cut answers to some critical inquiries relative to education. Despite the increased emphasis on accountability in literature, many questions regarding implementation remain: What does accountability mean? Why is it important in education? How is it effectively implemented in education? Who should be accountable for

what? The chapter concludes with an emphasis on literature agreements that form the baseline used in the discussion of the thesis findings and recommendations in chapter six.

3.2 The Definition of Accountability

Accountability "is an ever-expanding concept," and there is no consensus regarding its definition (Bovens, 2010, p. 947). It is ambiguous as a principle and when translated into institutional practice (Ng, 2010; Bovens, 2005). According to UNESCO's GEM 2017 report, one of the common issues with accountability is its diverse definitions across different disciplines (UNESCO, 2017). The inconsistency in the literature regarding its definition has undermined its importance (Bovens, 2010). Moreover, the excessive use of the term as a synonym for good governance, equity, and justice in official discourse has diluted its value (Bovens, 2005; Dubnick, 2002). Mulgan (2000) argues that its definition and scope have grown beyond its core meaning, which disturbed its purpose and applications. It has been argued that researchers have examined this broad term to address specific problems or questions with little precision (Mashaw, 2006).

Researchers report that the way accountability is defined is highly affected by the context, the culture, and the perception of the target audience (Dubnick, 2002, p.2). For example, some choose to define the term from an intrapersonal or moral standpoint, focusing on the individual's motives and actions. Roberts (2002) argues that an individual is accountable when he/she takes full responsibility for his/ her actions and their consequences. It is more of a virtue that positively qualifies the conduct of people (Bovens, 2010). In this broad sense, it has been argued that accountability is paradoxical and controversial, especially in the absence of agreement regarding accountable behaviour (Bovens, 2010; Bovens, 2007). Accountability as a virtue can be best examined by analysing political and academic discourse in the United States. It is built on a normative notion by developing criteria and standards to evaluate the conduct and hold individuals accountable (Bovens, 2010).

On the other hand, others choose to define the term from an interpersonal or interactive standpoint. It is a "relational concept" (Mashaw, 2006, p.117), a social agreement that obliges an individual to justify his/ her actions and be responsible towards someone else for the results to receive a judgment accordingly (Bovens, 2005; Romzek and Dubnick, 1998). Similarly, it is about being called to some authority to answer and justify one’s actions (Jones,

1992). Muglan (2000) argues that it is about public scrutiny; it involves social exchange and indicates an external account holder's authority. For instance, Bovens, Schillemans and Hart (2008) describe it as the applied tools and procedures that make governments effective in meeting public expectations.

Similarly, McKernan explains that accountability implies having the power to demand answers for performance and apply sanctions (McKernan, 2012). In that sense, it is more a mechanism; the focus here is not on the behaviour but on how individuals in governments and institutions operate (Bovens, 2007; Kooiman, 2003). It has been argued that accountability is descriptive and procedural in countries such as Australia, Britain, and Canada (Bovens, 2010).

Interestingly, the term's definition has moved from being defined as an ethical principle to taking a procedural and institutional feel in recent literature; hence, making it external, interactive, and authoritative (Mulgan, 2000). Simply put, it is mainly about identifying who is responsible for what (Smith, 2017). Similarly, UNESCO's GEM (2017) report defines it as "a process, aimed at helping actors meet responsibilities and reach goals" (p. xii). Despite the inconsistency in discussing accountability found in literature, in essence, it is the process of holding people or institutions to account for their actions by an external authority (Jones, 1992). According to Al-Omari (2004), as referenced by (Twissi and Al-Tarawneh, 2019), accountability is the way officials fulfil their roles and use their authority to achieve their tasks by reporting their progress and implementing policies. It has been argued that the internalisation of the concept might weaken the term's external focus, making it more difficult to define, measure, and control (Mulgan, 2000). On the other hand, Dubnick (2002) argues that attempts to address the term vagueness have encouraged attempts to operationalise it; which narrowed its meaning and created other problems.

Mashaw (2006) distinguished between three forms of accountability: public governance, market, and social. The thesis focuses on accountability in public social service institutions which aligns with Mashaw's public governance model. This form of accountability consists of three types: (1) political, (2) legal, and (3) institutional. Mashaw argues that accountability mechanisms in public institutions are usually formal, structured, and shared (Mashaw, 2006, p.127). Table (2) shows when accountability is applied in public governance as discussed by Mashaw (2006).

Table 2. Accountability in public governance (Mashaw, 2006, p. 127)

Who	To whom	Standards of appraisal	About what	How	Rewards and Sanctions
Public officials	Superiors	Instrumental	Implementation	Monitoring	Approval, substitute, etc.

In his work, Mashaw's accountability framework for public governance encompasses four features; first, it is relational and is implemented at both hierarchical and asymmetrical levels. It indicates that responsibilities are directed at all levels, and their nature depends on the mandate and policies implemented. Second, accountability tends to be procedural and formal in public institutions through a set of shared and transparent processes and regulations. Third, judgment in public accountability tends to be against agreed standards and criteria that define the performance indicators and outputs. Finally, publicising and transparently sharing accountability processes is considered an integral part of public accountability to enable the public to hold institutions accountable for their conduct.

Similarly, Kooiman emphasises the interactive style of governing societies today because of their complexity, diversity, and changing dynamics (Kooiman, 2008). Kooiman argues in his interactive governance model that "societies are made up of large numbers of governance actors, who are constrained or enabled in their actions by structure" (Kooiman and Jentoft, 2009, p: 820). He suggests that actors in society operate within certain structures and it is expected that those actors operate and are taken to account (Kooiman and Jentoft, 2009). Kooiman (2003) identifies three modes of governance: self-governance, co-governance, and hierarchical governance. Accountability as an institutional principle is reflected in Kooiman's hierarchical governance, where the top-down interactions are guided by laws, structures, and mandates.

Similarly, Dubnick (2002) differentiates between four frames of accountability: institutional, organisational, social transactions, and complex environments. Just like Mashaw's model, the institutional frame is related to regulations and roles by which authority is exercised (Dubnick 2002; Anechiarico and Jacobs 1996; March and Olsen, 1995). Despite the differences in addressing this broad notion, Koppell (2005) argues that accountability encompasses five different dimensions: transparency, responsibility, responsiveness, controllability, and liability.

Similarly, Lawson and Ranker (2005) identify three attributes that accountability systems tend to have: transparency, answerability, and controllability. Based on the investigation of the various models and concepts of accountability, the thesis focuses on the institutional models to answer the research questions.

3.3 The Importance of Accountability

Accountability is almost always perceived positively, and governments cannot seem to have enough (Pollitt, 2003). There is a global consensus regarding the value of accountability for the development of institutional performance (Baxter, Colledge and Turner, 2017; Schwandt, 2012; Bovens, 2010; Mashaw, 2006). It is more critical in public institutions to ensure quality services and proper use of public money (UNESCO, 2017; Al-Sawy, 2009; World Bank, 2003). Today, governments are eager to develop efficient public sector agencies for their societies' welfare and stability (Schwandt, 2012). The increasing use of the term in official and political discourse conveys an "image of transparency and trustworthiness"; it is a means for fair and impartial governance (Bovens, 2010, p.948). It is a synonym for many desired political and institutional qualities such as integrity, justice, transparency, and improvement (Bovens, 2005). Other studies indicate that individuals are expected to investigate and hold public officials to account due to the increased access to open data and public information (Al-Sawy, 2009). Consequently, public officials find themselves accountable outwards by responding to people's needs and expectations and upwards according to the chain of command (Al-Sawy, 2009; Mashaw, 2006).

When applied effectively, accountability helps to: legitimise public institutions (Bovens, 2005), improve performance (Baxter, Colledge, and Turner, 2017), and control the quality of conduct (Bovens, 2010) as described in detail below.

i. Accountability legitimises public institutions

Accountability is a principle of democratic governments; Bovens (2005, p.182) argues that "democracy remains a paper procedure if those in power cannot be held accountable in public." Hence, effective governance mechanisms that promote accountability enable public institutions to be more responsive to public needs (Mulgan, 2000). It primarily addresses stakeholders' needs through continuous dialogue and provides justifications for not meeting expectations (Bovens, 2010; Al-Sawy, 2009). It further ensures that officials are not misusing their power and authority, which enhances the government's legitimacy (Bovens, 2005).

Besides, public scrutiny validates governments, protects them against corruption, and the abuse of power (Al-Sawy, 2009; Rose-Ackerman, 1999). Research also reveals that rigorous accountability measures and mechanisms are necessary to ensure efficient use of public money and justify increased government spending on public service provision (Supovitz, 2009; World Bank, 2003). Thus, effective accountability mechanisms contribute to fighting corruption in societies (Mashaw, 2006). It has been argued that its absence allows public officials to abuse their authority and act without consequences or regard for the public and the people who authorise them (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004).

ii. Accountability enhances institutional performance

Literature reveals that well-designed accountability reforms that incentivise quality conduct can result in positive institutional changes (Gershberg, González and Meade, 2012). When effectively applied, they promote learning and a continuous growth culture in institutions (Argyris and Schon, 1978). Moreover, they emphasise organisational learning and reflection that make governments more effective in fulfilling their mandate and service provision (Bovens, 2010). Adopting transparent reporting and feedback systems encourage positive practices such as self-reviews and improvement (Baxter, Colledge and Turner, 2017). It has been argued that public scrutiny and transparent dissemination of information allow the public to provide input and feedback (Al-Sawy, 2009). Receiving external feedback about the impact of policies promotes learning and continued development (Aucoin and Heintzman, 2000). Moreover, evaluation results and reviews help improve and enhance performance in any institution (Frymier, 1996). It has been reported that the public sector witnessed many changes in its utilisation of information and its uses to indicate the "public sector efficiency and market accountability" (Wallenius et al., 2018, p. 135).

iii. Accountability contributes to quality control

Accountability enables institutions to control the quality of their results and prevent malperformance (Bovens, 2005). It has been argued that it improves performance and ensures that quality desired outcomes are achieved (Bovens, 2010). By developing quality performance indicators and standards, officials can be easily held accountable for meeting the expectations and guarantee that non-negotiable quality requirements are adhered to (UNESCO, 2017).

3.4 Negative Consequences of Accountability

Literature affirms that accountability is problematic to implement (Messner, 2009). Some authors have suggested that accountability should not be sought as an end, as it would have some unfavourable outcomes (Bovens, 2010; Messner, 2009; March and Olsen, 1995). There is a thin line between effective accountability and excessive control (Papadopoulos, 2010).

One of the main ironies of accountability is that it can discourage the behaviours it is designed to promote (Jos and Tompkins, 2004). The functions of accountability can quickly turn into dysfunctions if public accountability is overly pursued (Bovens, 2005). Consequently, balancing the advantages and drawbacks of accountability is intricate and problematic (Papadopoulos, 2010). As demonstrated in Table (3), some of the consequences of accountability include blame avoidance, excessive proceduralism, and unnecessary exposure.

Table 3. Functions and dysfunctions of public accountability (Bovens, 2005, p.15)

Functions	**Dysfunctions**
Democratic Control	Rule-obsession
Integrity	Proceduralism
Improvement	Rigidity
Legitimacy	Rising Expectations
Catharsis	Scapegoating

The above suggests that institutionalising accountability as a value is complicated and controversial (Papadopoulos, 2010); institutions need to consider the mechanisms that can balance both accountability functions while minimising the downside of increased accountability. Papadopoulos (2010, p.1033) writes that governments need to think about ways to "optimise accountability rather than simply maximising it"; keeping in mind the negative implications excessive accountability tends to have on individuals and institutions.

Whilst accountability appears direct and straightforward in theory, many problems and conflicts become apparent when accountability is applied and operationalised (Lindkvist and Llewellyn, 2003). For instance, some accountability systems encourage undesirable behaviours such as gaming, cheating, and slacking (Busuioc and Lodge, 2015). Many have recognised that

accountability leads to selective reporting. It tends to prevent people from reporting negative events to avoid punishment and reputation damage (Busuioc and Lodge, 2015; Papadopoulos, 2010; Philp 2009).

Second, it has been argued that excess accountability and scrutiny may lead to raising expectations and ruthlessly publicising government faults and imperfections. Consequently, increased transparency may turn public accountability into the politics of scandal and decrease the governments' legitimacy (Papadopoulos, 2010; Heald, 2006; Bovens, 2005). Besides, the literature reveals that government officials usually find themselves being inspected by several entities or forums at different levels (Papadopoulos, 2010; Bovens, 2010; Bovens, 2005). To make matters more complicated, each of these forums may have different expectations based on different sets of norms and procedures, and may therefore pass different judgments (Bovens, 2005). Consequently, government officials must work within a web of overlapping and sometimes contradicting expectations (Roberts, 2002).

Third, increased emphasis on administrative integrity and corruption control can lead to proceduralism that seriously hampers the reflexivity, efficiency, and effectiveness of public organisations (Anechiarico and Jacobs 1996). Bovens (2005) indicates that strict control using accountability systems tends to hinder entrepreneurial thinking in public institutions and turn them into rule-obsessed bureaucracies.

According to Twissi and Al-Tarawneh (2019), Arab countries struggle to implement effective public accountability models and stakeholder engagement in their service provision. For instance, they argue that accountability systems in Jordan, like many Arab countries, faced many obstacles due to: (1) the lack of stakeholder involvement and awareness, (2) rigid centralisation of decision-making, (3) continuous change in management, and (4) the low capacity of key implementers of those mechanisms.

3.5 Applications of Accountability

Models of modern accountability originated by William I in 1085-1086 in England, when he ordered royal agents to list possessions and properties in books for taxing purposes (Dubnick, 2002). It was developed to reinforce shared values between the public and the government. However, it has been argued that, in essence, accountability was sought and valued before that as evident in religious texts (Dubnick, 2002). Since then, bookkeeping

evolved into centralised auditing practices that governments use to hold businesses and individuals to account (Shaftel, 2010). Despite the increasing number of accountability models that exist today, most of these models are built based on similar accounting principles that originated a long time ago (Shaftel, 2010). Today, there are some inconsistencies in the way institutions implement accountability with the existence of many competing approaches and definitions (Mashaw, 2006; Dubnick, 2002).

It has been argued that there are a set of common characteristics that all accountability systems share. First, accountability mechanisms must be external (UNESCO, 2017; Bovens, 2005; Mulgan, 2000); Mashaw indicates that it is "a relational concept" that requires a person or an institution to be answerable for their conduct (Mashaw, 2006, p.118). Accountability is primarily a process of being called to some authority to answer and justify actions (Jones, 1992). It implies that an external entity such as the government or the public has the power to demand answers for performance and to apply sanctions (McKernan, 2012). It is about public or external scrutiny at its core in institutions (Mulgan, 2000).

Second, accountability mechanisms must be responsive to address the public's demands (Papadopoulos, 2010). Modern governance is becoming more responsive and interactive due to the increased dynamics, demand, complexity, and diversity of today's societies (Kooiman, 2008). Public institutions find themselves accountable outwards by responding to people's expectations and upwards according to the chain of command (Kooiman, 2003; Corbett and Corbett, 1996). Today, governments are encouraged to be more cooperative and interdependent with non-public actors and stakeholders in policymaking (Papadopoulos, 2010; World Bank, 2003). Moreover, effective systems of accountability tend to have closed loops for stakeholders' feedback and opinions (Levin, 1974); this requires enhancing feedback platforms and information flow in public institutions to support improvement efforts and continuous learning (Papadopoulos, 2010). Nowadays, accountability in public services is demanding more involvement of the public to enhance highly sought principles such as democracy (World Bank, 2003). The World Bank emphasises that governments worldwide are taking up initiatives that empower the public as the primary stakeholder and target beneficiaries in their service provision.

Third, accountability has a direct relationship with information (UNESCO, 2017; Winkler and Herstein, 2005; Lloyd, Oatham and Hammer, 2007; World Bank, 2003). Accountability mechanisms must incorporate processes that require all stakeholders to

produce and use information properly to achieve the desired results (Levin, 1974). Research suggests that successful implementation of the mechanisms depends on citizens' ability to use and interpret new information to form their opinions and update current beliefs (Clinton and Grissom, 2015). Accountability demands transparency in providing timely and credible information for the public (Lloyd, Oatham and Hammer, 2007). It has been argued that the need for transparency and public scrutiny will always give accountability the upper hand when tough questions are raised (Baxter, Colledge and Turner, 2017). Therefore, many public policy reforms are increasingly reporting on performance to expect more meaningful information which means more accountability and superior outcomes (James, 2011).

Fourth, accountability systems inform institutional behaviour, and procedures need to promote desired practices rather than the other way around (UNESCO, 2017; Lawson and Ranker, 2005). Meaning, it is useless if accountability mechanisms do not result in improved services and performance. Furthermore, accountability systems encourage public institutions and governments to identify their shortcomings and improve their service provision, because they act as "motivational levers" that can promote the achievement of goals (Smith, 2017, p. 133).

In an attempt to unpack accountability as a governing principle, Mashaw (2006, p.118) highlights six "basic features" of a legitimate accountability system: who, to whom, about what, through what process, according to what standards, and the potential consequences. Addressing Mashaw's questions as clear as possible reduces the vagueness of the concept and its applications. In earlier works, Levin (1974, p. 364) writes that an accumulation of literature findings suggest that there are four diverse concepts of accountability as following: "(a) as performance reporting; (b) as a technical process; (c) as a political process; and (d) as an institutional process." A mix of all four concepts of accountability is necessary for effective implementation (Levin, 1974).

3.6 Accountability in Education

Accountability is essential for developing education systems due to recent political, economic, social, and cultural changes globally (UNESCO, 2017). As a concept in educational governance, some countries have sought and approached it using different mechanisms for more than one hundred years. For example, the British Parliament approved a results-based

payments plan to reward teachers based on their students' performance financially. The plan was revoked due to stakeholders' resistance and objections (Frymier, 1996). Similarly, teachers were called to account for their conduct and classroom behaviour back in the Common school days in the United States (O'Day, 2002).

With time, accountability has gained more importance in recent educational policy dialogue. Systems worldwide are searching for the most effective mechanisms to achieve better outcomes (UNESCO, 2017; Smith; 2019; Smith, 2017; Shaftel, 2010). Moreover, the development of the World Bank's SABER tool in 2011 was evidence of the efforts taken by international organisations and governments towards encouraging comprehensive efforts to reform education systems through the use of assessments to enhance accountability (Rogers and Demas, 2013). It has been argued that it is not enough that governments provide equitable access to education for all; the learning experience and outcomes are as critical (Schwandt, 2012). Recent OECD reports indicate that education has expanded to encompass stimulating curricula, high-performing teachers, safe and well-equipped learning environments, and learning outcomes (OECD, 2012). Smith (2014) indicates that the international debate has shifted from providing educational access for learners to achieving efficiency and equity in educational outcomes. For example, in the Nordic countries like Sweden and Denmark, the aim behind more accountability is to ensure the equal provision of good educational services to all students (Wallenius et al., 2018).

However, it has been argued that despite the increased education spending and reforms, many systems globally tend to fail to meet expected outcomes (UNESCO, 2017; Smith, 2017; Takeda, Demas and Shibuya, 2014; World Bank, 2003). Today, education systems are rethinking school accountability to promote continuous development rather than compliance and control (Bae, 2018; Smith, 2017). Hence, accountability is highly sought in education to justify continued low student attainment levels despite the increased spending (Mbiti, 2016).

Accountability systems applied in education monitor the efficient provision of equitable educational services for all learners, especially marginalised groups such as learners with disabilities, refugees, and low-income communities (UNESCO, 2017; World Bank, 2003). They make sure that schools are fulfilling their roles and responsibilities (Shaftel, 2010). The intensified emphasis on outcomes encouraged the adoption of mechanisms that evaluate teachers and schools in terms of their students' achievement (Smith, 2017; Lewis and Young, 2013). School-based accountability is primarily about evaluating schools by holding school

principals and teachers accountable for their students' outcomes in assessments (Bae, 2018; Figlio and Loeb, 2011). Thus, accountability systems in education use students' results to drive school improvement and system performance (Smith, 2017; Ben Jafaar, 2011; O'Day, 2002).

Today, many countries worldwide are increasingly investing in education, taking up initiatives to maximise their outcomes, and preparing students to be productive citizens. Yet, many systems fail to equip their students with basic skills in literacy and numeracy as shown in international assessments such as PIRLS and PISA (UNESCO, 2017; Takeda, Demas and Shibuya, 2014; World Bank, 2003). The question here is who is responsible for the failure of meeting expected performance outcomes in education. Finding the most effective approaches to governing schools for achieving better results remains a challenge to many education systems (Bae, 2018; UNESCO, 2017; Smith, 2017; Smith, 2014; Shaftel, 2010).

It is believed that holding schools publically accountable makes them more responsive to the parents and government (UNESCO, 2017; Figlio and Loeb, 2011). Levin (1974, p.356) writes that "performance-reporting systems will lead to favourable changes and make the schools more responsive." Levin continues to affirm that for the successful implementation of accountability in education, the way schools are governed must be thoroughly examined. Levin's early work aligns with recent literature; for instance, it has been argued that accountability systems on their own do not directly improve performance, still, they serve that purpose by (1) setting expectations, (2) communicating results to schools, (3) navigating improvement efforts towards priorities, and (4) identifying successes (Students Can't Wait, 2020, p.2).

3.7 Models of Accountability in Education

Today, there is a global shift in defining and measuring quality in education; many systems are redefining how quality can be assessed and monitored statistically via managerial processes (Schwandt, 2012). The stretched definition of quality education acknowledges the complexity and multi-layered nature of education. It has been argued that schools need to be accountable for more than just students' learning outcomes (Bae, 2018; Smith, 2014; World Bank, 2003). In response, there has been a growing interest in standardised assessments in many countries like European countries, Australia, and Latin American countries over the past two decades (Figlio and Loeb, 2011).

Similarly, recent research suggests that educational policies that are input-focused solely are ineffective and need supporting initiatives that focus on improving learning and student outcomes in schools (Mbiti, 2016; Smith, 2014). Moreover, a supportive environment with sufficient resources, capacity, and commitment must be nurtured for better results in education (UNESCO, 2017). Thus, the educational context has witnessed a growth in the number of accountability models implemented universally. It has been argued that "many countries are developing capacities for conducting accountability systems" (Figlio and Loeb, 2011, p.386). The increasing number of countries that use standardised assessments indicates the growing role of accountability policies all over the world. It is believed that "improving national testing systems is an important, perhaps the key, strategy for improving educational quality" (Chapman and Snyder, 2000, p.457).

Today, there are diverse approaches to accountability in education; their relevance and level of sensitivity to the context they are in determine their effectiveness (UNESCO, 2017). There are several accountability models discussed in the literature that include: market, decentralised, political, legal, bureaucratic, and moral accountability (UNESCO, 2017; Normore, 2004). However, developing accountability mechanisms that are effective in education remains a challenge (Smith, 2017; O'Neill, 2013; Schwandt, 2012). The review of the literature indicates that models of accountability fall under two primary approaches: a) increased school autonomy and choice, and b) standards or performance-based accountability (Betebenner, Howe and Foster, 2005; Wells and Holme, 2005) It has been argued that the combination of improved school autonomy/ choice policies with increased performance-based accountability would lead to favourable practices in schools and improve results (Glatter, 2012).

Despite the diverse accountability systems applied in education, "no one approach is universally effective at all times" (UNESCO, 2017, p.2). It needs to be designed and operationalised to fit the contexts and the priorities of the country (UNESCO, 2017; Ben Jafaar, 2011). It has been argued that a perfectly accountable education system is "one that maximises the utility or satisfaction of the relevant constituencies subject to resource (and possibly other) constraints" (Levin, 1974, p.375). Thus, education systems must develop context-relevant mechanisms to address the long-debated issue of who is accountable to whom and for what in education (Frymier, 1996, p.43). However, it is important to note that school accountability is an aspect of higher governmental accountability which holds policymakers accountable by

evaluating their decision-making and use of public money (Figlio and Loeb, 2011; World Bank, 2003; O'Day, 2002).

The following section provides a brief description of two distinct educational accountability models implemented in two countries: the United States and the Republic of Chile. Each of the two models has a set of features that resemble the design and structure of the Independent schools model in Qatar. For instance, the standards-based model implemented as part of the NCLB reform in the United States used learning standards and standardised assessments to hold schools accountable. The NCLB approach to implementing accountability resembled RAND's which consisted of curriculum standards and standardised assessments. Similar to RAND's approach, the NCLB reform used standardised assessments to compare achievement among all schools and benchmark the performance of all students against the standards. It also decentralised, as in Qatari Independent schools, other educational decisions to be made at the school level that include curriculum design, teacher recruitment, and financial management. In addition, it required that all schools issue report cards about their performance to promote transparency and accountability. Like Qatar's ENE experience, the NCLB was politically supported and large in scope which brought to light many insights regarding governing reforms at a national level.

The NCLB experience was highly researched and that provided a lot of insight after years of implementation which helped to understand the characteristics and limitations of this accountability model. Although, the NCLB was replaced with the Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA) in 2015, however, the NCLB reform was implemented long enough to provide researchers with reliable information about its impact in comparison to more recent reforms.

Similarly, the market-based approach implemented in Chile aligned with two principles of the ENE reform: choice and autonomy. As discussed in the second chapter, RAND believed that parental choice would reinforce accountable behaviour in schools. The Chilean model emphasised the role of parents in holding schools accountable. The decentralisation of the school governance and the use of report cards to encourage parental involvement in Chile was also similar in approach to RAND's accountability model in Qatar. Thus, a more in-depth look into both models was necessary for two reasons: (1) identify the design components of each model; (2) learn about the merits and limitations of each model.

3.8 Standards-Based Accountability (No Child Left Behind – the United States)

Accountability is considered highly crucial and believed to be necessary for reaching the intended educational results in the United States (Smith, 2017; Shaftel, 2010). One of the primary responses to the increased political concern regarding the quality of education was the introduction of standards-based accountability in the United States in the early 2000s (Hamilton, Stecher and Yuan, 2012). However, the discussion of accountability was introduced earlier in "A Nation at Risk" report that was published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983 (Hopmann, 2008). The report indicated that a standards-based approach was vital to ensure that targets are met and that schools fulfilled their roles. Many challenges hampered the successful implementation of some of the attempts to reform education in the United States (Shaftel, 2010). Many reforms lacked coherence and failed to agree regarding the learning expectations for all schools. In response, a standards-based accountability reform was initiated to measure schools' and students' performance (Hopmann, 2008). According to Bae (2018), the standards-based accountability movement implemented in the United States used an incentive theory in its design. The theory suggests that through rewards or punishment, stakeholders would be urged to fulfill specific roles and responsibilities to reach intended aims (Bae, 2018). Consequently, educators, schools, and parents would become more encouraged to improve the system's overall performance.

The movement towards prescribed standards for accountability was attributed to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reform (Smith, 2017). The NCLB reform was the first to implement a national-level system for accountability (Rothman, 2015). The reform required that all states develop learning standards and standardised assessments, and agree on a set of yearly performance targets for schools that need to be monitored and met (Hopmann, 2008). The NCLB reform in the United States required all children to be assessed in specific grades in core subjects, including science, mathematics, and reading. Students' performance in the standardised assessments would enable the system to determine poor-performing schools and reward high-performing ones (Hamilton, Stecher and Yuan, 2012). Legislators believed that the standardised assessments were suitable for increasing accountability pressures and demands for more autonomy at the school district level (Perrone, 1977). The standardised assessments aimed to promote equitable and better education for all children; particularly disadvantaged students with special learning needs and ones from economically challenged families (Shaftel, 2010). It was believed that holding schools accountable for testing results would positively and automatically influence students to learn more, teachers to work harder,

and schools to operate more effectively (Hopmann, 2008; Heilig and Darling-Hammond, 2008). Also, the NCLB reform required that all states disseminate report cards at the state, school, and student levels to inform accountability further (Cameron, Moses and Gillies, 2006). In short, accountability, as implemented in the United States, was about using student performance data through a set of administrative mechanisms to improve their academic achievement (Figlio and Loeb, 2011). There were some core features of standards-based accountability in the United States as reported by a range of studies as discussed below.

i. The learning standards were developed to communicate a clear set of learning objectives and performance targets for all schools in core subjects (Figlio and Loeb, 2011).
ii. Schools were held to account at the school and teacher level through the value-added model. The model calculated progress made in students' test scores to assess teacher and school effectiveness (Figlio and Loeb, 2011).
iii. The model shifted the focus from inputs and processes towards academic outcomes. The standards enabled the development of explicit descriptions of expected knowledge and skills for all schooling stages (Fullan, 2000).
iv. The implementation of standards enabled simple and objective alignment of all assessments and performance levels among many students to reach standardised learning targets among different contexts (Smith, 2017).
v. Standards-based accountability aimed to promote all schools' performance by putting all schools on one scale to identify high-performing schools according to prescribed standards and encourage other schools to measure their performance accordingly and plan for improvement (Bae, 2018).
vi. Standards helped in achieving equity by holding all schools to the exact expectations (Stotsky, 2000). According to their subgroup, the standardised assessments following the NCLB's standardised assessments shed light on the disparities in students' achievement (French, 2018).

In general, there were four main components in the accountability systems as implemented in the United States: (1) learning standards, (2) standardised assessments to measure students' learning, (3) targets for improvement, and (4) rewards or sanctions according to performance (Shaftel, 2010). Ideally, in standards-based systems, performance is measured against carefully defined standards and indicators, using rigorous monitoring processes with accompanying feedback loops (Schwandt, 2012). It has been argued that the NCLB has brought

attention to underserved student populations and raised students' performance in some subjects like Mathematics (Rothman, 2015).

Regardless of the massive efforts made, there was growing evidence that the United States' accountability model was not as effective as intended (Bae, 2018; Smith, 2017; Rothman, 2015; Heilig and Darling-Hammond, 2008; Rothstein, Jacobsen and Wilder, 2006). First, it has been argued that using standardised assessments to indicate the level of students' attainment was not enough to measure the quality of students' progress or the quality of schools (Bae, 2018; Smith, 2017; Rothman, 2015; Perrone, 1977). Relying mainly on test scores to hold schools accountable encouraged unwanted practices that include drilling, narrowing the curriculum, teaching to the test, and overlooking other important non-tested subjects like arts and history (Shaftel, 2010). Also, focusing on student test results as the key indicator for their performance quality has proven to be inequitable and did not allow all students to be exposed to meaningful learning opportunities (Heilig and Darling-Hammond, 2008; Perrone, 1977). Moreover, it was reported that focusing on easy-to-measure outcomes like student academic results and graduation rates moved the attention from other valuable outcomes (Rothman, 2015; Figlio and Loeb, 2011). The standards-based accountability as implemented in the United Stated also favoured academic subject performance over acquiring essential skills that include critical thinking and problem solving (Heilig and Darling-Hammond, 2008).

Second, implementing a top-down approach to accountability made policymakers blame schools and students for failure in meeting targets. Although schools did not receive the needed resources nor support, many states made the failure about them; thus, making them the "primary beneficiaries of accountability" instead of the students (Heilig and Darling-Hammond, 2008, p.107). For instance, schools that did not meet their annual targets were sanctioned and were subject to some interventions (Rothman, 2015).

Third, rewarding schools for student performance encouraged good teachers' movement to high-performing schools, leading to more inequality (Smith, 2017). It also led to other selective school admission and manipulation of students testing samples (Smith, 2014). It has been reported that high-performing children usually receive better learning opportunities than low achievers in standardised assessments. For instance, according to their performance in tests, students are placed in special education programs or lower-level tracks. Perrone wrote that "teachers and children do not need these kinds of external pressure" (Perrone, 1977, p.10). Moreover, relying on outcome measures such as students' performance in standardised

assessments narrowed the curriculum and promoted a very restricted definition of quality education (Smith, 2017; Shaftel, 2010; Darling-Hammond and Sykes, 2003).

Lastly, inconsistency in defining performance (e.g., proficient) for each grade hindered a fair comparison of student performance in different states (Rothstein, Jacobsen and Wilder, 2006, p.2). Rothstein, Jacobsen, and Wilder indicated that even the highest-performing countries of the world would not be able to meet the absurdly ambitious proficiency levels required by the NCLB reform. They wrote that "no matter how well-intentioned, (states) cannot perform psychometric miracles that are beyond the reach of federal experts" (Rothstein, Jacobsen and Wilder, 2006, p.2).

It has been argued that education cannot be contained in macro-level assessment criteria. It is more open-ended and focused on how learners experience education (Rothman, 2015; Schwandt, 2012). Thus, the new phase of accountability in the United States focuses on addressing all NCLB reform challenges. It also acknowledges that equity sits at the heart of any accountability efforts (CCSSO, 2015). The system has broadened the set of measures to assess student progress and the quality of their learning. The new indicators tackle students' mastery of 21st-century skills, developing learners' non-cognitive skills, and college and career readiness (Shaftel, 2010; Cameron, Moses and Gillies, 2006).

Moreover, according to students' needs, there is a more equitable allocation of resources, focusing on students from low-income families and non-natives. The newly modified accountability mechanisms in the United States were designed to support continuous development instead of compliance and control (Bae, 2018). This would be achieved by doing more disaggregation of performance data to identify achievement gaps and needs of student groups and subgroups; consequently, which would help identify improvement targets for each group (CCSSO, 2015; Rothman, 2015). For instance, Georgia adopted a broader set of performance indicators that covered four areas: student performance, professional learning, institutional indicators, and parental engagement. The state also developed a colour-coded dashboard that generated reports to all stakeholders about progress in meeting the state targets (Rothman, 2015).

The literature suggests that the new ways of approaching standards-based accountability in the United States are still in their early stages of experimentation, and their success in achieving their targets is yet to be studied and measured (Bae, 2018; CCSSO, 2015).

3.9 Market-Based Accountability – (Promoting Private Education Choice-The Republic of Chile)

To implement accountability in a technical sense (as applied in business), many governments are expanding the privatisation of education; governments pay private investors to provide specific educational services as measured by the quality of student results (Levin, 1974). The emergence of market-based principles and the increase in private schools have resulted in a need for central monitoring of all schools (Wallenius et al., 2018). Research suggests that increased privatisation of education is usually accompanied by more accountability (Mbiti, 2016).

Investors in education adopt a 'pay for results' philosophy in doing business, which usually comes with clear business plans and performance indicators. In doing so, governments could easily monitor performance and hold schools accountable (Wallenius et al., 2018). Many countries adopted a market-based model to provide choice, develop schools' performance, and improve academic achievement. Today, many countries provide voucher alternatives to increase parental choice and power, linking schools' income to the number of enrolled students and their learning results. Governments aim to encourage competitiveness and quality among schools through choice (Gershberg, González and Meade, 2012).

As part of a national effort to privatise public services in the early 80s, the Republic of Chile decentralised school governance and started to manage schools at a municipal level. The government aims were to: (1) emphasise accountability for results, (2) increase efficiency, and (3) promote responsiveness to the public needs. The central government equally financed schools (both private and public) according to student enrolment (Gershberg, González and Meade, 2012). The Chilean reform changed drastically from its original design with the implementation of several corrective initiatives to address the challenges that emerged in implementation. The government increased the centralised monitoring of schools and high-stakes assessments to address equity issues (Gershberg, González and Meade, 2012).

There were some positive impacts on the quality of privatisation of educational services in Chile, as evidenced in the literature. First, private schools tend to be cost-efficient; they generally operate at a lower cost with fewer resources. Also, they generally result in incomparable and even better learning outcomes than public schools (Mbiti, 2016). Second,

private schools tend to operate more effectively; for example, some schools allocated less time for teaching some subjects and still managed to get comparable and sometimes even better academic results than public schools (Muralidharan and Sundararaman, 2015). Third, voucher programs tend to promote accountability and increase positive competition among schools, which would positively impact the overall productivity of the education system (Mbiti, 2016). Lastly, the introduction of choice and vouchers in Chile increased the community's demand for school performance information (Scott, 2007).

On the other hand, there are several challenges of market-based accountability. The competitive pressure increases the inequality of services provided to marginalised and disadvantaged individuals such as the poor and disabled students (UNESCO, 2017). Plus, the voucher systems usually result in dramatic increases in fees, limiting the choices for low-income families and leading to more segregation (UNESCO, 2017; Levin, 1998). It has been argued that the introduction of vouchers usually raises the interest of parents to admit their children to private schools for a better learning experience (Ladd, 2002). Moreover, literature has indicated that vouchers tend to have a limited impact on school performance, student outcomes, and teaching quality in private and municipal schools (Gershberg, González and Meade, 2012; Ladd, 2002). It has been argued that the emphasis on parental choice usually results in the inflation of student test scores to increase parental satisfaction (Gershberg, González and Meade, 2012). Research indicates that the increased number of private schools in Chile emphasised the common belief that private schools were better in quality than public ones regardless of their actual performance (Gershberg, González and Meade, 2012). This belief was formed due to the lack of accountability and responsiveness in public schools (Mbiti, 2016).

Countries adopt different models of service privatisation of education to increase efficiency and achieve better outcomes (Levin, 1998). However, the success of private schools is heavily dependent on the quality of government control, the effective utilisation of information, and the market demand (Mbiti, 2016). Research indicates that governments fail to maximise the benefits of promising initiatives implemented by non-government/ private institutions. For example, In Kenya, the government’s scaling up of the contract teacher programs (as implemented in private schools) failed to meet intended expectations due to low accountability and inefficient government systems (Duflo, Dupas and Kremer, 2011).

Qatar's ENE reform called for a schooling system that balanced both choice and accountability; two distinct principles that required much effort to achieve. A survey of the literature that investigates the implementation of accountability in the United States and choice in Chile revealed that each schooling model comes with limitations. As highlighted earlier, both models resulted in a number of issues related to equity, performance gaps, and challenges in governing schools. Similarly, research about Qatar's reform has indicated that officials faced many challenges operationalising similar principles. Despite the variations between the experiences of the two countries in comparison to Qatar, however, the comparison above confirms that governing schools using complex principles remains a struggle. Reflecting on the lessons learned from both experiences, it is evident that education systems fall short in making these principles work while coping with the increasing and changing demands of the public. Hence, the thesis focused on understanding the institutional gaps that hindered the implementation of accountability mechanisms in Qatar in light of the lessons learned from both models.

3.10 Core Characteristics of Effective Educational Accountability

Accountability systems in education are designed so that public demands would improve service provision and provoke school improvement efforts (Supovitz, 2009). They oblige individuals and educational institutions to be more accountable for meeting a clear set of targets based on their legal, political, and social responsibilities (UNESCO, 2017). Even though there is limited and sometimes mixed evidence regarding the effectiveness of those systems; there are a set of common factors that education systems need to consider in their implementation.

First, education systems must have clear plans and targets that are realistic, comprehensive, and shared with defined lines of responsibility (UNESCO, 2017). According to O'Day (2002), despite the varying systems to hold schools accountable, they are generally linked to performance targets and expectations. It has been argued that agreeing on shared targets and leaving little room for ambiguity is critical for implementing accountability successfully in an education system (Levin, 1974). According to UNESCO's GEM report, "governance and management problems in any sector are often blamed on unclear lines of responsibility" (UNESCO, 2017, p.3). It is believed that clear performance standards promote a culture of assessment for accountability, where teachers use those standards to inform their

daily classroom instruction (Fullan, 2000). However, governments need to avoid developing goals that are too low, too many, or irrelevant to real priorities as they lead to failure sooner or later (Students Can't Wait, 2020). Guarino and Tanner (2012, p.233) explain that to attain the desired level of excellence in education, "excellence must be defined by establishing national proficiency targets based on these types of performance measures."

Second, accountability is linked to information; systems that disseminate more information tend to have more accountability (UNESCO, 2017; Fullan, 2000). According to O'Day (2002, p.296), "information is the lifeblood of all accountability mechanisms". Reporting on school performance data and student results is the "most straightforward interpretation of the accountability concept" (Levin, 1974, p.364). Data sharing is a useful practice for promoting accountability in any system and improving its management practices (Gershberg, González and Meade, 2012; Winkler and Herstein, 2005). For instance, central Georgia met all its performance targets and outperformed other districts by using digital data dashboards that schools and officials used to monitor performance (Rothman, 2015).

It is believed that the quality of data is determined by how it is being utilised for decision-making and informing all stakeholders, given that it is timely, accessible, meaningful, and actionable (CCSSO, 2015; Cameron, Moses and Gillies, 2006). Data collection, analysis, and reporting is a daunting and costly mission. Additionally, it requires developing the local capacity to carry out those processes and use it for decision-making (UNESCO, 2017). Transparency is a means for achieving accountability, therefore, publishing schools' performance data makes them accountable and supports them to make informed decisions (Wallenius et al., 2018; Winkler and Herstein, 2005).

Third, an integral component of educational governance is evaluation (Wallenius et al., 2018; Smith, 2014). Accountability needs assessments to judge the fulfilment of intended objectives against a criterion, and it cannot be achieved without evaluation (Frymier, 1996, p.10). Accountability and autonomy go hand in hand, inferring that educators assume responsibility when given authority and freedom to make decisions (Frymier, 1996). Thus, more countries are moving towards decentralised schooling systems and building school leadership capacities in self-evaluations. Consequently, as schools assume more responsibilities, external evaluations are practiced (OECD, 2013).

Fourth, stakeholders need to be involved and widely consulted for planning, implementation, and decision-making (UNSECO, 2017; Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit and

Pittenger, 2014). The World Bank report emphasises the importance of the stakeholder's voice in policy development and implementation. In addition, the report argues that policymakers must include stakeholders in decision-making (World Bank, 2003). Bridging gaps between beneficiaries and policymakers increases positive change and promotes a mutual sense of responsibility. There is a need for open and continuous consultation of stakeholders in every step of the policy design and implementation process (UNESCO, 2017). Effective accountability systems are inclusive and provide opportunities for stakeholders through feedback loops to deliver their voice (Levin, 1974). The people involved in education must accept, ratify, and adopt the goals and targets being agreed, and feel complete ownership and excitement towards achieving them (Frymier, 1996). Yet, Frymier argues that directional goals seem to be more effective than specific goals, which are usually neglected or dropped over time.

Fifth, accountability is about being responsible (Frymier, 1996); thus, improving education is a shared responsibility that requires all stakeholders' commitment. To reach the desired level of their commitment requires cultivating the right work norms, skills, and culture at individual, institutional, and community levels (Fullan, 2000). This means that schools, teachers, and parents must work interdependently with governments to reach intended outcomes. However, this interdependence is one of the main reasons for confusion and ambiguity regarding lines of responsibility (UNESCO, 2017). Moreover, the more parents and the community are involved in decision-making at the school level, the more responsive and accountable schools will be (Mbiti, 2016). Both educators and policymakers must be held accountable for accountability systems to work; while educators are responsible for ensuring quality teaching, legislators are responsible for ensuring fair and equitable quality educational services for all (Shaftel, 2010). Bae writes that "through consensus building and transparency that new systems of accountability can truly be viewed as systems of shared responsibility and continuous improvement" (2018, p.20). There is no doubt that stakeholder inclusion in decision-making and setting targets tends to build trust (UNESCO, 2017). When government officials, educators, parents, and students choose to work collaboratively towards shared goals, progress is guaranteed in a trusting culture.

Lastly, political support is essential when holding schools accountable; however, public officials tend to focus more on building more schools, applying more technology, and employing support staff than developing governing structures that enhance performance and conduct (UNESCO, 2017; Mbiti, 2016; Cameron, Moses and Gillies, 2006). Many countries

focus on "highly visible education inputs" while very few focus on what supports learning and improve accountability (Mbiti, 2016, p.111). Thus, governments must adopt initiatives and policies that target teacher quality, the improvement of learning attainment, and the school environment by implementing governing structures that support that.

Accountability appears to be the solution for ensuring that everyone is fulfilling their roles and that improvements are happening according to plans (Smith, 2014). To implement accountability effectively in education, systems must develop the needed capacity, provide adequate resources for implementation, and promote the right kind of commitment for improvement among all stakeholders (UNSECO, 2017). Moreover, effective monitoring of teachers and school leaders through well-structured mechanisms could improve performance (Figlio and Loeb, 2011).

3.11 Challenges in Implementing Accountability in Education

Efforts to effectively implement accountability-driven reforms are usually hampered by many challenges related to the system's readiness, capacity to adopt new changes, and motivation to take up more roles and responsibilities (UNESCO, 2017; Smith, 2014; O'Neill, 2013; Shaftel, 2010). It has been argued that government responsiveness to public demands has not improved despite increased emphasis and expansion of public accountability (Greiling and Halachmi, 2013). The literature reveals that many legislative challenges make it complicated to effectively implement accountability mechanisms in education (Shaftel, 2010). Also, performance-based accountability rarely has a clear correlation with improved education systems or a positive impact on student performance (UNESCO, 2017; Gershberg, González and Meade, 2012).

Literature indicates that system-wide accountability reforms fail in education due to three main challenges: (1) the difficulty of developing an effective reform design, (2) implementation failures, and (3) the absence of a supporting economic, social, and political change (Gershberg, González and Meade, 2012). Similarly, O'Day (2002) highlights three main concerns to consider when schools are the primary actor in accountability systems. First, the relationship between individuals' conduct and collective accountability is a complex one, indicating that school success rests on all stakeholders' commitment and their willingness to change. Second, schools' responsiveness to external policies and rules tends to be difficult,

especially if they do not align with their norms and school culture. Third, schools tend to face difficulties in the utilisation of information to inform improvement efforts.

This comprehensive literature review signals several common challenges faced by governments worldwide that hinder the successful implementation of accountability in education. These challenges tend to exist at varying degrees in education systems according to the context they are in. Some of the main challenges include fear of punishment, overlapping responsibilities, and low local capacity to perform mechanisms effectively as discussed below.

i. Multiple stakeholders with diverse needs and responsibilities

In education, there are many players in a very interdependent and complex system. First, education systems serve a diverse group of stakeholders with diverse and sometimes conflicting goals and needs (UNESCO, 2017; Smith, 2014). There even might be contradicting preferences and expectations among different levels of government. With limited resources and a lack of understanding of stakeholders' expectations, education systems tend to fail to meet the needs of all (Frymier, 1996; Levin, 1974). Similarly, governments have complicated and overlapping roles and expectations, and they are not the only ones holding schools accountable (Figlio and Loeb, 2011; Papadopoulos, 2010). Schools have to juggle their commitments to parents and the community while trying to meet the government's expectations (Figlio and Loeb, 2011). The issue is to what degree and to whom schools should be responsive: political decisions or the people's demands (Levin, 1974). It is difficult to identify what schools are accountable for in a multi-layered schooling system with conflicting goals and diverse stakeholders (Levin, 1974, p. 370). O'Day (2002) confirms that teachers are bombarded with a lot of irrelevant and sometimes distracting information that does not serve their instructional practices.

Second, many accountability mechanisms are ineffective because they fail to capture all constituents' full spectrum of connections and interdependencies (UNESCO, 2017). Without clear lines of responsibility, systems would hold people accountable for results that they do not have control over or are influenced by other people (Levin, 1974). Holding people accountable for results they cannot control generates unwanted behaviours such as blame avoidance and even manipulation by adjusting their roles to escape blame or punishment (UNESCO, 2017). Holding officials accountable for many and sometimes conflicting responsibilities is questionable and even unethical (Messner, 2009). The unclear interdependence between

various players in an education system is one of the "several factors limiting the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms in education" (UNESCO, 2017, p.1).

ii. Demanding and difficult to maintain mechanisms

Although accountability is easy in theory, many problems emerge as soon as it is put into practice (Figlio and Loeb, 2011; Bovens, 2010; Papadopoulos, 2010; Mulgan, 2000; Levin, 1974). First, implementing accountability requires consistent documentation, monitoring, and reporting to prove that responsibilities are met and results are achieved (Bovens, 2010). Accountability-driven reforms are accompanied by increased workload and responsibilities at the government level for monitoring purposes (Gershberg, González and Meade, 2012). Effective implementation of accountability mechanisms is a complicated task and demands many resources and capacities that are human, financial, and institutional (Verger and Parcerisa, 2017). For example, in England, more than 50% of teachers working in schools complained about the increased data collection for reporting and the extra workload that it created (UNESCO, 2017).

Second, administering high-stakes tests for various groups of students and comparing schools' performance against annual targets has been extremely daunting and "a major preoccupation" for districts and schools in the state of Texas (Heilig and Darling-Hammond, 2008, p. 77). Besides, broadening the scope of assessments or indicators to encompass more subjects and skills would be financially costly (Figlio and Loeb, 2011).

iii. Information gaps and challenges

Having easily accessed information does not necessarily mean more accountability; supporting mechanisms need to be put in place to hold people into account (Papadopoulos, 2010). First, the extent to which stakeholders use and are affected by information depends mainly on the reliability of data and the strength of their beliefs and assumptions (Clinton and Grissom, 2015). Clinton and Grissom's study confirms that school performance information does not usually influence policymaking and stakeholders do not update their beliefs because of lack of trust or prior negative beliefs. Similarly, in Kenya, 72% of parents indicated that they do not know how to use their children's learning data (UNESCO, 2017). Levin (1974) argues that there is no agreement regarding the objectives of the disseminated information and its use by the constituent of concern.

Second, adopting a transparent reporting system in education requires developing procedures for collecting data, analysing it, and reporting it at different education system levels (Winkler and Herstein, 2005). The process tends to be costly and demanding for many education systems. Third, transparent dissemination of information comes with a price as it would generate a spectrum of responses and reactions from different stakeholders (O'Day, 2002). O'Day confirms that educators need to acknowledge the dynamicity of information which makes it difficult to have unified interpretations. It has been reported that many policymakers face the dilemma of choosing between timely or rich information on students' performance (Hamilton, Stecher and Yuan, 2012). Also, systems could disseminate the wrong kind of information, which might, in turn, manipulate policymakers as well as the public (O'Day, 2002). It has been argued that much of the information provided to schools and parents is irrelevant to the improvement of teaching and learning and tends to draw attention away from what matters (O'Day, 2002).

Despite the efforts made by education systems to promote parental awareness and choice through more data dissemination, school performance indicators provide little guidance to parents due to the complex nature of the performance data (Wallenius et al., 2018). Literature suggests that intelligent accountability in education, as elsewhere, also needs to "communicate, not merely to disseminate," relevant evidence that can be assessed by those to whom professionals and institutions are accountable (O'Neill, 2013, p.4).

iv. Contradictory behaviours

Accountability is a term that is usually linked to sanctions or punishment; thus, holding educators publically accountable for their students' results tends to promote behaviours that ironically contradict their purpose (Copp, 2019; Smith, 2017; O'Neill, 2013). People tend to avoid reporting mistakes or unfortunate events to escape judgment, reputation damage, or even punishment (Baxter, Colledge and Turner, 2017). Rigid accountability mechanisms and regulatory procedures make teachers feel that control was more important than improvement, and that control takes away the professional ownership of teachers over their work (Wallenius et al., 2018). Moreover, the literature indicates that evaluating teachers is complicated because it generates controversy, intimidates teachers, and affects their relationship with parents (Mizala and Schneider, 2014).

Manipulation of the testing student samples and selective admission are some of the unintended results of holding schools accountable for high-stakes assessments (Shaftel, 2010;

Heilig and Darling-Hammond, 2008). Similarly, in Brazos City, Texas, school administrators received bonuses for achieving intended targets in student test scores. Otherwise, they were expected to face termination. In response, school administrators felt much pressure and tried to raise the score by cheating (Heilig and Darling-Hammond, 2008). Similarly, in Singapore, schools developed cosmetic reports that appealed to government inspectors without clear reporting criteria (Ng, 2010). Moreover, governments are discovering that teachers react to accountability policies by teaching to the test (Copp, 2019; Figlio and Loeb, 2011). Similarly, in Germany teachers narrowed the curriculum and taught to the test (Thiel and Bellmann, 2017). This occurs mainly in accountability systems where high-stakes testing is used to evaluate schools and teachers (Chapman and Snyder, 2000).

v. Increased inequity

It has been argued that accountability systems that use student performance data might lead to inequity and imbalances in schools (UNESCO, 2017). For example, proficient teachers prefer working in high-performing schools to be rewarded for their students' progress (Smith, 2017; Shaftel, 2010). Consequently, it creates imbalances in the quality of teaching and learning in schools; leaving low-performing schools to struggle even more (Smith, 2017). Moreover, systems that use high-stakes testing for accountability encourage teachers and educators to manipulate the system by adapting classroom instruction and admitting students selectively to stay away from trouble (Smith, 2017). Research findings indicate that a small percentage of financial resources reach schools because there are no accountability mechanisms managing education resources (Mbiti, 2016). Moreover, testing for accountability countries tend to have a bigger gap in performance between public and private schools, not found in summative testing countries (Smith, 2017).

It has been reported that even in low-stakes accountability education systems such as Germany, some unintended behaviours were encountered after implementing accountability policies. For example, principals were guilty of selective student admission, expelling low performers, and excluding them from tests (Thiel and Bellmann, 2017). Moreover, schools tend to take low-achieving students on trips on exam days or cheat to achieve higher scores (Shaftel, 2010). Similarly, when a test-driven accountability policy was introduced in the United States, schools began to manipulate low-income and low-performing students and classify them as disabled, so they would be exempt from taking the tests (Figlio and Getzer, 2002).

3.12 Conclusion

The literature review that preceded the development of the research methods provided the conceptual foundation that narrowed the research's focus. Given that accountability was a "driving frame" for the large-scale educational reform in Qatar, it was possible to explore it from many different angles (Nasser, 2017, p.4). Literature related to governing models in education indicated no consensus regarding the effective models of holding schools accountable for performance (UNESCO, 2017; Heilig and Darling-Hammond, 2008). Thus, the research intends to address a gap found in educational literature by focusing on institutional mechanisms and accountability systems adopted for better educational governance and improved results. Moreover, conducting a thorough exploration of the context of the study provoked several pressing questions that needed answers. Therefore, to provide a sensible explanation of the topic of study, an in-depth investigation using the right set of questions was necessary. The thesis aimed to analyse how accountability was implemented in Qatar's education following the ENE reform. To achieve the research aims and objectives, it was critical to divide this broad research aim into specific questions (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2002). The research focused on answering the following four questions:

(1) How was accountability perceived by key stakeholders in Qatar's education as a principle in the Education for a New Era reform?

(2) What mechanisms were put in place to hold schools accountable following the Education for a New Era reform?

(3) Who was accountable to whom in the implementation of the accountability mechanisms in Qatar's education system?

(4) What were the gaps in the implementation of the accountability mechanisms following the Education for a New Era reform?

Accordingly, the methods, as explained in Chapter four, were selected and carefully developed to provide clear answers to the above questions. The first three questions of the research focused on arriving at a clear description of the context of accountability in Qatari schools in terms of peoples' views and institutional mechanisms put in place. The fourth research question shed light on the obstacles and gaps that hindered the effective

implementation of accountability. Answers to the four research questions facilitated the identification of relevant and practical policy recommendations and institutional interventions that could be adopted by Qatar's Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

4. Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Chapter four addresses the different methodological approaches and procedures that were used to conduct the thesis. It examines the relationship between the applied methods and the philosophical paradigm and methodological framework used in the thesis. More specifically, how this framework was used to examine the concept of accountability from key stakeholders' perspectives of accountability mechanisms and who is responsible for the implementation of these mechanisms during Qatar's education reform. It was also used to identify gaps in the implementation of the accountability mechanisms following the ENE reform.

In the chapter, an overview is provided regarding the ontological and epistemological perspectives that guided the thesis's design and execution. The chapter also includes a description of the research design, data collection methods, the reasoning behind choosing the research methods, the sampling technique, and data analysis procedures. Finally, a discussion regarding the dimensions of a good qualitative research study, ethical concerns, and the limitations of this study is provided.

4.2 Ontological and Epistemological Stances

Researchers bring their research beliefs and philosophical assumptions that inform and influence their research, such as the questions they ask and investigate (Scotland, 2012; Creswell, 2008). These assumptions impact the research design and the selection of theories and methods that guide the research. Thus, the researcher's beliefs and views are embedded in some theoretical perspective, and their thoughts of knowledge and social reality affect their examination of the phenomena and social behaviour they are studying (Mack, 2010; Crotty, 1988; Burke et al., 2009). Researchers must consider the ontological and epistemological assumptions that inform their research and influence the research methodology and data collection methods (Scotland, 2012; Creswell, 2005).

It is widely accepted that there is always a foundation that underpins all researchers' approaches to their research (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011; Savage, 2006; Patton, 2002; Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2011). This foundation includes the presence of ontological (the nature of the social reality), epistemological (how and what we know), and

methodological (the research process) assumptions. By either a conscious decision or by default, each researcher begins the research process by considering ontology, and then they adopt various, epistemological, and methodological positions (Grix, 2002). The concept of paradigm can be defined as beliefs, values, and techniques that guide the type of problems that researchers research and the suitable explanations (Kuhn, 1970). A paradigm is the "basic belief system or world view that guides the investigation" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.105). Research paradigms are based on ontological and epistemological assumptions, and these underpin the methodology and methods (Dieronitou, 2014; Scotland, 2012). It has been argued that researchers with differing ontological and epistemological views would study a similar phenomenon differently (Scotland, 2012).

According to Cook and Reichardt (1979), a paradigm contains a philosophical world view that is linked to a particular research method. Researchers in the social and behavioural sciences possess different beliefs about the nature of knowledge and how knowledge can be collected and analysed. These beliefs are the basis for several methodological approaches to conducting research grounded on distinctive philosophical, ontological, and epistemological understandings. According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), these different understandings of knowledge and research can be categorised into three groups: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research.

The thesis was influenced by the interpretive paradigm that accepts the idea that people construct reality based on their interactions and beliefs (Neuman, 2014). Schwandt (1994) suggests that the purpose of the research is to construct understandings of a phenomenon based on lived experiences or from the point of view of those who experienced it. Thus, the ontological view of interpretivism is one of relativism; indicating the subjectivity of reality according to how individuals perceive it (Scotland, 2012). The interpretive paradigm does not consider the social world as something out there and is to be discovered by the researcher. Instead, the interpretive researcher considers the social world and events being constructed by humans; and the objective of the researcher is to view a phenomenon through the informants' experiences, perceptions, and reality (Thanh and Thanh, 2015). Hence, interpretivism suggests that reality is "mediated by our senses" and individually constructed (Scotland, 2012, p.11). Crotty (1998) suggests that individuals' perspectives and social reality can be comprehended through social interaction. Therefore, people's definitions and communications are the basis of social reality (Neuman, 1997).

Concerning epistemology, the interpretive paradigm considers the purpose of research to produce understandings of a phenomenon from the experiences and perspectives of those who live it (Grix, 2004). The epistemological position of interpretivism is one of subjectivism (Scotland, 2012, p.11). Thus, reality is subjective and governed by shared understanding and not unchanging laws (Ritchie, Spencer and O'Connor, 2003). Researchers attempt to explain reality in the interpretive paradigm as seen from the participants' eyes (Bryman, 2001; Patton, 2002). Given that the research aims to investigate accountability as a guiding principle in governing schools during the ENE reform, identify its various applications, and learn how educators perceived it, the interpretive paradigm guided the research methodology, design, and data analysis techniques. The interpretive paradigm intends to construct knowledge from people's perceptions and understandings (Scotland, 2012); thus, the paradigm aligned with the research aims and guided the design of the research methodology and methods.

4.3 Methodological Framework

Kothari (2008) defines research methodology as a systematic process a researcher follows to solve problems. Thus, the methodology can be considered "how evidence is gathered and meaning derived from it" (Anderson and Burns, 1989, p.45). The research methodology includes several dimensions including research methods. Still, research methodology must consider the reasoning behind the methods, the context of the study, and the reason for using a particular method or technique (Kothari, 2008). Regarding a research problem or study, methodology asks why the study is being done, how the problem is defined, and how and what data will be collected and analysed (Kothari, 2008). There are various methodological approaches used to conduct educational research. Each of these is founded on a philosophical, ontological, and epistemological understanding or paradigm (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017).

Reality is constructed, interpreted, and experienced by people from their unique perspective resulting in multiple realities (Krauss, 2005; Bogdan and Biklen, 1997; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). According to Alharahsheh and Pius (2020), interpretivism seeks to deeply explore contexts and derive rich meanings from human experiences. It allows researchers to capture a comprehensive view of the participants' experience and provide rich insights. The concept of accountability was not deeply investigated in terms of applications and impact in Qatari schools. Moreover, there was limited research that captured how the ENE principles were experienced by policymakers in comparison to educators working in schools.

Interpretivism allowed flexible exploration of the issue and provided explanations for some implementation gaps. The clarifications provided by the research participants about challenges faced in implementing accountability highlighted important cultural factors that continue to negatively influence implementation. Interpretivism allowed the discovery of human-related factors that would not be easy to discover using other methodology.

To answer the research questions, the methodology had to capture reality from the position of both the reform thinkers and the target constituents. That comparison allowed the researcher to pick up rich information and deep insights regarding what went wrong in the implementation. The careful consideration of the research methods helped to identify out of sight forces that tend to threaten improvement efforts,

Qualitative research is embedded in the interpretive paradigm that sees quantification as limited in nature (Krauss, 2005). Qualitative researchers believe that the purpose of research is to discover reality (Creswell, 1998). They employ inductive logic to move from the specific to the general (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). Since the thesis aimed to elicit meaning from policy documents and access stakeholders' views and understanding of accountability, a qualitative approach was selected and used to design this research. Regarding the implementation of accountability policies and measures, semi-structured interviews provided access to stakeholders' understanding of accountability and also the transferring of the theory of accountability to its practices in the education system. The study greatly benefited from collecting data from the content analysis and then building on these findings by probing and collecting additional information via interviews.

Qualitative methodology would provide vivid descriptions of the varying dimensions of accountability and its applications in the context of Qatari Independent schools. More importantly, studies in qualitative research facilitate the investigation of complicated issues in their actual contexts to inform evidence-based decision-making and practice in many sectors (Baxter and Jack, 2008). The chosen research methodology aimed to draw insights from various sources of information that include, policy documents, governing structures, procedures, and officials' views.

4.4 Research Design

The thesis uses critical policy analysis methodology to analyse the implementation and effects of accountability mechanisms in Qatari schools. According to Diem et al., (2014, p.12) critical policy analysis is a process that helps in "bridging the gap between policy and practice." Critical policy methodology combines empirical research about the influence of policy on practice while investigating the complexities of political relationships. It is believed that the combination of empirical research with theory increases the effectiveness of policy analysis (Rata, 2014). It has been argued that new approaches to critical policy analysis in educational research dismiss narrow or linear ways of thinking; they encourage contextualised analysis of findings that reflect the dimensions of educational policies and the people implementing them (Diem et al., 2014). Thus, the thesis is inductive and explanatory in nature; and the design and structure of the research were intentionally fluid to achieve the research objectives.

The thesis was conducted in two stages. Stage one used content analysis to examine relevant documents and governing structures that describe accountability and the theoretical intention behind them. Stage two used semi-structured interviews to understand how accountability as a guiding principle in the ENE reform was perceived and implemented in Qatari Independent schools. The qualitative research methods provided an in-depth understanding of the actual implementation of accountability from the stakeholders' perspectives. See Figure2.

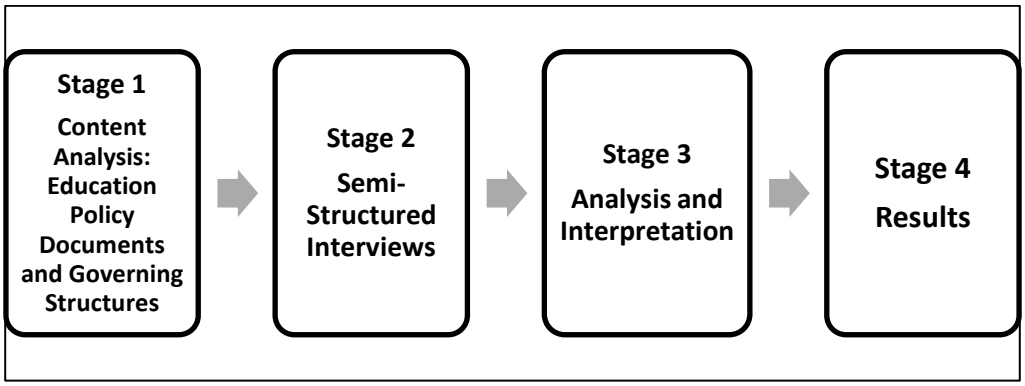

Figure 2. The stages of the research methodology

In stage one, 25 policy documents and official letters that related to managing Independent schools in Qatar were collected and analysed. Firstly, the content analysis aimed to map out the accountability mechanisms applied to hold schools accountable. Secondly, the analysis examined the extent those mechanisms were comprehensive, coherent, and

consistent. Thirdly, the analysis identified the alignment between the mechanisms applied compared to RAND's initial reform design. Fourth, the research findings were compared to the findings elicited from the literature regarding other accountability mechanisms implemented by other countries in the literature review.

Initially, several policy documents were acquired from the MEHE's official website and the Internet. Secondly, a set of historical reports and relative official documents were borrowed from the MEHE's library. Finally, before the interviews in stage 2, some of the officials and school leaders chosen for the research were asked to provide additional documents that supported the topic of study. The participants willingly shared the documents and samples of school portfolios. A total of 45 documents were acquired, only 25 were selected for the content analysis due to their direct relevance to the topic. The review of related literature and primarily the research written about accountability in Qatar education provided the founding framework regarding the type of documents needed for the thesis. Hence, the official documents selected for the analysis were related to (1) student evaluation, (2) school monitoring or evaluation, (3) school leaders'/ teachers' performance, and (4) school operators/ teachers' contracts. Although the content analysis was conducted before the interviews, additional documents were acquired after the interviews to address some aspects highlighted by the participants in the interviews.

In this thesis, qualitative content analysis was used to describe, interpret, and identify meaningful themes in the policy documents when framed against the backdrop of the research questions of the thesis. The analysis looked at the overall system governing structures and mandates as documented in the Ministry's website and the local newspapers. The documents varied in type and included policy documents, official circulars, school report cards, and official letters sent to schools. Other official press reports that provided some context regarding some of the policies were analysed as well. The other irrelevant documents consisted of internal school reports, annual plans, curriculum standards, and official circulars for schools. Although those documents did not support answering the research questions, they helped in further understanding the context and were used in the second chapter. Other important documents reviewed for the research included: the National Development Strategy 2011-2016, the National Development Strategy 2018-2022, and Qatar's National Vision 2030. These documents were used primarily in describing the educational context in Qatar and the philosophy of the reform. Finally, three reports issued by RAND about the reform's philosophy and design were used for making alignments and comparisons.

Stage two of the study employed semi-structured interviews to identify stakeholders' thoughts and opinions regarding accountability and its applications. For this study, education officials from the MEHE, Independent school leaders, and teachers were interviewed. In the final stage, several educational experts were interviewed to validate the generated themes and findings of the research regarding accountability and its applications in education. They were knowledgeable about the original theories that resulted in the various applications of accountability in Qatar's education system. All of them served as consultants in the early stages of the reform. The semi-structured interviews began with the MEHE officials who nominated some school leaders for the interviews. It was important that the school leaders chosen for the interviews worked in Independent schools long enough to provide a profound explanation of the topic. Finally, several educational experts were sought based on the recommendations of both officials and school leaders.

In stage three, the ideas that evolved from the content analysis and the semi-structured interviews were analysed to identify common themes and findings. To further validate the analysis findings, all the emerging ideas were organised under general themes that answer the main research questions. Then, evidence from the interviews and the documents were extracted to support the identified themes. In discussing the emerging ideas, references were made to similar findings from the literature that discussed similar educational contexts to validate them even more. In the final stage, the key findings were summarised and used to discuss the research results and recommendations.

4.5 Stage One: Content Analysis

Content analysis is extremely useful in qualitative research because it facilitates the interpretation of the phenomenon being studied and further helps the researcher understand the context (Bowen, 2009). In addition, it enables a wide coverage of a specific phenomenon because the researcher can study documents produced over long periods or in many contexts (Yin, 2003). Hence, it made it easier to track the changes that occurred in accountability mechanisms ever since the launch of the reform in 2004. Table 4 lists the documents used for the content analysis.

Table 4. List of policy documents

No	Title	Type	Year
1	Evaluation Institute Annual Report	Official report	2004
2	Staff Personal Policy	Official policy document	2006
3	Role of Board of Trustees in Independent Schools	Press release	2006
4	Regulatory Handbook: Guidelines and Regulations for Operating Independent Schools	Official policy document	2006
5	School Self-review Framework	Official policy document	2007
6	Education for a New Era – Quarterly Magazine	Official release	2007
7	Education for a New Era – Quarterly Magazine	Official release	2008
8	School Exceptional Evaluation Report	Official report	2008
9	Student Evaluation Policy-1	Official policy document	2008
10	Announcing the Results of the Secondary Independent schools	Press release	2009
11	An Emiri Decree Organizing the Supreme Education Council	Official policy document	2009
12	School Annual Report Guide	Official policy document	2009
13	The Organisational Framework for BoTs in Independent Schools	Official policy document	2009
14	School Evaluation Report	Official report	2010
15	Student Evaluation Policy-2	Official policy document	2011
16	Teachers' Licensing Policy	Official policy document	2011
17	QNSA Policy for National Accreditation	Official policy document	2011
18	School Evaluation Policy	Official policy document	2012
19	General Framework for the Internal Assessments for Independent Schools Policy	Official policy document	2012
20	Independent Schools Organizational Structure	Official policy document	2014
21	Student Evaluation Policy for Grades 1 to 3	Official policy document	2015
22	Grade Three Student Evaluation System	Official policy document	2015
23	The Introductory Guide to the Grade 12 Student Evaluation System	Official policy document	2015
24	The Introductory Guide to the Grade 4- 11 Student Evaluation System	Official policy document	2015
25	A Guide for the Evaluation specialist (For public schools)	Official policy document	2016

It is important to note that Qatar's education witnessed some structural changes since the beginning of the reform in 2004 (Al-Banai and Nasser, 2017; Guarino and Tanner, 2012; Zellman et al., 2009). Therefore, it was difficult to get hold of some documents for the analysis. However, the main documents that guided the implementation of the core accountability mechanisms issued at varying stages of the reform were obtained and analysed.

The codes generated from the content analysis guided the interviews that were conducted at the following stage. The interviews were conducted with several former officials

who worked in the SEC or contributed to the design of some of the accountability mechanisms. On their own, documents could be misleading if they were not supported by robust analysis and other information sources for validation (Bowen, 2009). Thus, the data from the interviews helped tremendously in validating the document analysis results and clarifying some of the ambiguities.

4.6 Stage Two: Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand how accountability as a guiding principle in the ENE reform was perceived and implemented in Qatar's education. The interview questions focused on the respondents' point of view of the different accountability mechanisms and their influence on how schools operated. The interview questions included questions that focused primarily on what, why, and how to reach a holistic view of the issue. Moreover, the order of the interview questions started with a general inquiry about accountability as an institutional principle and gradually moved towards being more specific to elicit the participants' views and ideas about its implementation. The interviews were conducted to (1) identify stakeholders' understanding of accountability as a principle, (2) learn about the implemented accountability mechanisms and their impact, (3) learn about their point of view regarding the mechanisms implemented, and (3) elicit their ideas for improvement.

It has been argued that to fully grasp a socially constructed issue, researchers need to shift their attention towards how individuals constructed and understood their experience (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013). Hence, given that accountability was a governing tool aimed to promote the system's performance, the interviews facilitated in-depth interpretation of its various applications and implications on the behaviour of the research participants.

Semi-structured interviews as a research method facilitate reaching a full understanding of the issue being studied from the view of diverse participants (Rossetto, 2014). Also, interviews allow the researcher to actively listen and engage in meaningful discussions that are deep and informative (Baxter and Babbie, 2003). They give the researcher further evidence that confirms the findings from other data sources (Tellis, 1997). Investigating accountability from the various perspectives of different stakeholders helped to unravel the twists and turns of the mechanisms implemented to hold schools accountable. The participants' responses revealed considerable insight regarding why some mechanisms worked while others did not work.

Additionally, the responses validated a lot of the findings from the content analysis in the previous stage.

4.7 Interviewee recruitment

It has been argued that samples tend to be smaller in qualitative research than quantitative research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). Moreover, random sampling would not be appropriate in qualitative research as it would not help the researcher to reach a thorough understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Marshall, 1996). For example, not all people are good at describing or analysing their own and other people's views of a particular issue or phenomenon. The participants needed to have the knowledge and experience to provide a credible view of accountability as it was implemented in Qatar's education. Moreover, the sample needed to represent all the primary stakeholders who were directly influenced by the accountability mechanisms implemented during the ENE reform. Thus, a diverse group of participants was sought for the interviews.

The research addressed the issue of accountability at two main levels; at the policymakers level in the SEC and at the Independent schools level. Therefore, the sample size and the expertise of the people selected for the interviews were carefully planned. The study participants were purposefully chosen based on the following: (1) their contribution to the reform design at its early stages, (2) their influence on policy design and decisions in the recent years, and (3) their role as the primary implementers of the accountability mechanisms in Independent schools. Therefore, the research sample consisted of teachers, school leaders, and former/ current officials working in the MEHE to provide a holistic view of the issue.

Table 5. the Sample and the stages of the interviews

Stage	Participant Code	Participant Profile	Purpose
1st	MEHEO1	Curriculum and school support expert	Understand the structure of accountability mechanisms that were implemented in schools.
	MEHEO2	Curriculum and school evaluation expert	
	MEHEO3	Former reform expert and leading official	
	MEHEO4	Former reform expert and leading official	
	MEHEO5	School evaluation expert	
	MEHEO6	School evaluation expert	
	MEHEO7	Student evaluation expert	
	MEHEO8	Student evaluation expert	
2nd	SL1	School principal/ Academic VP	Learn about how

	SL2		schools experienced accountability.
	SL3		
	SL4		
	T1	School teachers	
	T2		
	T3		
	T4		
3rd	SME1	High-level educational experts and officials in the following areas: planning, monitoring/ evaluation, and institutional performance.	Validate some of the key findings of accountability and its applications.
	SME2		
	SME3		
	SME4		
	SME5		
	SME6		

As shown in table 5, the interviews followed a specific sequence to reach the intended objectives of the research primarily in three main stages. Ever since the initiation of the ENE reform in 2004, Qatar's education went through condensed and sequential structural changes over a short time. The changes required changes in management, and that forced many officials to transfer to other departments within the SEC, work in other educational institutions, or simply retire. It resulted in the loss of many of the initial reform thinkers who did not have the opportunity to stay in the system long enough to have a thorough understanding of the progress of the reform policies and mechanisms. In the beginning, it was challenging to find some participants who agreed to talk openly about a critical topic like accountability and address some of the downfalls of the reform implementation. Thus, it was important to interview officials who were still working in the Ministry or ones who had served in primary positions in the early stages of the reform design and implementation. Out of the 12 officials who were approached, eight willingly agreed to participate in the interviews. The other four either thought they could not offer much insight because of the constant changes in the system, or simply were not interested. However, the officials interviewed covered the core areas related to the research questions such as student assessments and school evaluations. To compensate for any unintended gaps, more interviews were conducted in the second and third stages; in addition, more evidence from literature was used to support the key findings from the interviews and the document analysis.

The Ministry officials were interviewed to understand accountability as it was intended and implemented during the ENE reform. All of them influenced the design, implementation, and monitoring of many of the accountability mechanisms implemented in Independent schools at the time. Three participants were former high-level policymakers and leading officials in the

design and implementation of the reform in the beginning. The other two participants had a long experience in the design and implementation of some of the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. They worked as experts in the area of student evaluation for more than ten years. Three participants were specialised in school evaluations and contributed to the design of the related mechanisms. After the final interviews in stage one, it was evident that repeated themes signaled the arrival to some general ideas that directed the interviews in the other remaining stages.

Second, a total of four government school leaders were purposefully selected by the researcher for the study. The school leaders had experienced the progress that occurred before, during, and after the reform. One of the principals played an integral role in the reform design and was highly influential in the policy design and decision-making at the beginning of the reform. That principal was purposefully chosen to understand how some of the accountability mechanisms were developed and policymakers' views on how schools would effectively implement them. The rest of the school leaders were primarily end-users of the implemented mechanisms and had little impact on decision-making. However, it was necessary to interview them to understand how accountability was applied by individuals who were not involved in their design. Moreover, it was important to capture their perception of how those mechanisms were implemented and their influence on school performance. It was surprising that the interviews with school leaders were very insightful as school principals were directly affected by the accountability mechanisms and had much to say about them.

Third, four teachers who worked at schools for the past 16 years or more were interviewed. The interviews aimed to learn whether the implemented accountability mechanisms had affected the teachers' classroom practices. It was critical that the teachers chosen for the interviews had worked at schools during the reform and experienced the changes that occurred over the past years. The teachers selected taught different stages in different schools. Talking to teachers offered valuable information that addressed some missing pieces from the former interviews.

Finally, six educational experts were interviewed who had knowledge of the reform and highly influenced its initial design. The experts had long-time experience in leading national-level projects. Two of the participants worked closely as consultants in the reform design and had worked as senior leaders in leading educational institutions in Qatar. The other four

participants currently work in high positions in educational institutions as well. The experts interviewed helped in confirming some of the themes generated in the early interviews.

After each interview, the participants were asked to nominate suitable candidates who could provide a vivid image of accountability. It has been argued that the snowball sample technique is beneficial as a sampling technique in qualitative research (Marshall, 1996). Adopting that technique in choosing the research sample was wise for two reasons: (1) the study was explanatory, and (2) the small Qatari educational setting. Similar names were brought up at the end of each interview, and it was critical to get them involved to reach an accurate and realistic view of the issue. Also, the interviews continued until reaching some repeated themes.

Out of the 22 participants interviewed, only four participants refused to have the interview recorded because of the sensitivity of their current roles. Thus, their responses were written during the interview and were validated at the end of each interview. Moreover, some participants did not speak English fluently and responded in Arabic. Their responses were transcribed using an online application, translated, and used in the results chapter. Other participants talked primarily in English but converted to Arabic to vividly express their opinion. Some recordings were difficult to be accurately transcribed using the online applications due to language change or low voice. Thus, some parts needed to be added to the electronically transcribed texts.

4.8 Data Analysis

Analysing data of qualitative nature consists of a number of procedures that usually include interpreting, classifying, and making correlations for description purposes (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2002). Bogdan and Biklen (1997) argue that data of qualitative nature requires breaking it into units, classifying it, organising it, and looking for patterns and themes to reach solid conclusions. Therefore, there is no single correct way for analysing this type of data, and it is up to the researcher to choose the analysis methods that fit the research goals and purpose (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). In addition, induction as a reasoning model for qualitative data analysis is "data-driven" and eventually leads to the formation of the study theory as more data is gathered (Brinkmann, 2014, p.721). It is believed that research methods that construct knowledge from deeply rooted presumptions tend to "delimit what we can know"

and hinder reaching genuine findings (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013, p.16). Therefore, the data collection stage was "loosely designed" to support achieving the research objectives (Brinkmann, 2014, p.721). Yet, the data analysis process had to abide by some techniques to provide an accurate and profound explanation of accountability in Qatari schools. To unveil complexities in the issue being studied, it was critical to use the right data collection and analysis techniques (Bazeley, 2009). As demonstrated in Figure 3, the literature review guided the type of data needed to answer the research questions. The data collected from the document analysis and interviews was analysed using data coding followed by thematic analysis to reach sound and solid answers for the research questions.

It has been argued that data analysis in qualitative research is inevitably interpretive. Therefore, it tends to be developed based on the interaction between the researcher and the data sets. This tends to threaten the accuracy of the analysis especially, that qualitative data, in essence, is an interpretation of reality (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2002). Therefore, the analysis followed a specific sequence and was conducted in stages while more data was collected. This helped to cross-check some of the analysis findings with more data and reinforce the generated themes. Moreover, complete objectivity was essential to reach an authentic view of accountability and its mechanisms the way they were implemented in schools. Thus, joining the findings from different methods using coding techniques and thematic analysis allowed the researcher to make a diagonal analysis of accountability at all levels in Qatar's school system. The final stage summarised the data analysis findings and revisited some of the literature on the issue for further accuracy check.

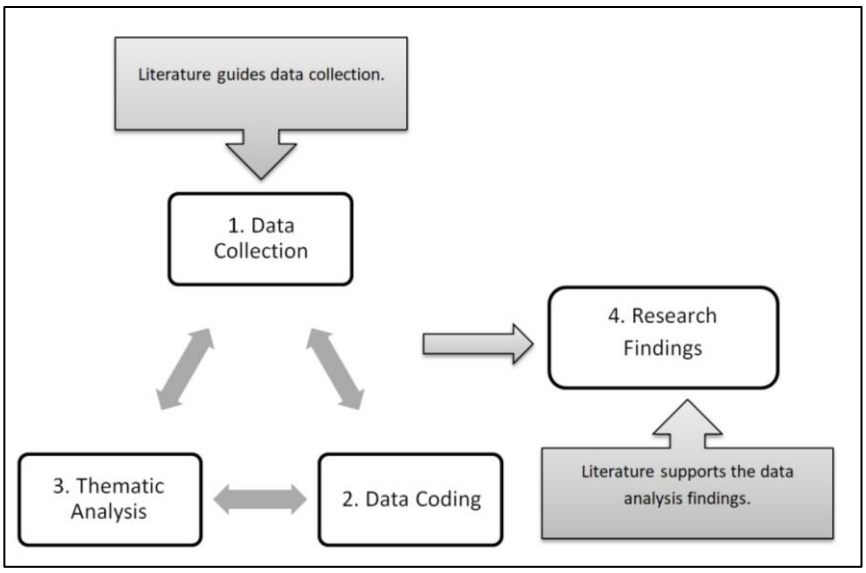

Figure 3. The data analysis process

i. Data coding

Data coding is the practice of catching significant inputs and classifying it before the analysis process (Boyatzis, cited in Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Codes can summarise large sets of data into a manageable number of categories (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). Good codes are derived from the data being analysed to capture profound content that contributes to the aims of the research (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). To simplify the analysis process, codes must be clear and reflect single concepts (Kothari, 2004). Since the purpose of the research was to explain a phenomenon, the researcher categorised and coded the data into main and supporting themes to form theories that inform the research results and recommendations (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). Figure 4 below explains the stages of coding followed in the data analysis of both the document analysis and the interviews.

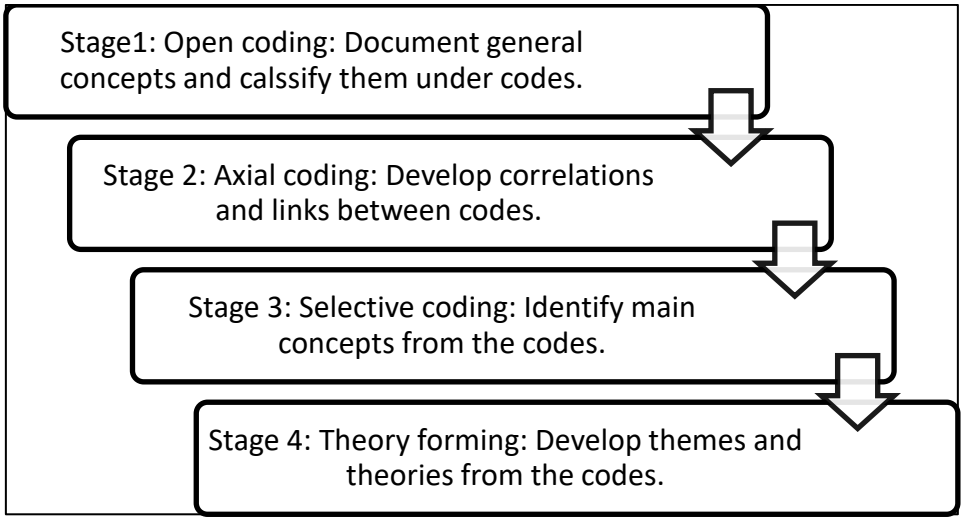

Figure 4. Stages of data coding (adapted from Dillon, 2012)

As shown in Figure 4 above, the data coding process started with codes identified from analysing the policy documents and governing structures. Large sets of data were extracted from the policy documents that contained thick and detailed descriptions regarding how schools were accountable to both the SEC and parents. Initially, the data from the policy documents was organised under the four research questions using a table and supporting quotations from the documents were highlighted (see appendix 5). A second review of the data was done to extract common words and identify the messages in the policy documents. Then, codes for every research question were gathered and supporting quotations were pulled out from the policy texts. There were several repeated words and ideas that helped in developing preliminary

codes. Trying to find links in heavy documents was complicated for many reasons. First, the policy documents were highly condensed, very descriptive, and detailed; some documents were more than one hundred pages long. Second, the policy documents were issued by two different institutes (Education and Evaluation institutes) with different mandates and little alignment and coordination in direction (Zellman et al., 2009; Nasser, 2017). Third, the system witnessed many policy changes since the launch of the ENE reform (Nasser, 2017). This resulted in a pool of documents with many inconsistencies and changes in purpose and tone. Fourth, there was no official entity with a chronological sequence of all the policies and official documents that were issued following the reform. Thus, it was critical to (1) pay attention to the finest details in the development of codes; and (2) avoid the development of codes from few explicit or weak data sets.

In the second stage, the interviews with the selected sample were conducted and the participants were asked about the preliminary codes from the document analysis. The interviews were very informative and the participants shared valuable insights openly. Some interviews lasted more than 60 minutes which resulted in rich data for analysis. After transcribing the interview recordings, the interview data was analysed and coded in a table. The repeated words and ideas were highlighted in the interview transcripts and recorded in a table under the related research question (see appendix 4). The words and ideas that were repeated helped to form the codes. The codes from the interviews were then compared to the codes from the document analysis. The analysis of the codes from the documents and interviews emphasised several ideas that formed the basis for thematic analysis.

To answer the first research question, there was repetition in the participants' responses which accentuated some ideas that formed the codes. For example, the participants used similar words or ideas such as quality performance, taking responsibility, goal setting, audits and checks, and justifying action. These codes were matched to the preliminary codes that stemmed from the documents that include joint responsibility, audits and self-reviews, performance monitoring, and evaluation. These codes were then organised under the research question and used to develop broader themes that provided a comprehensive answer.

ii. Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is the detection of the evolving ideas and themes from analysis and codes that consequently direct the categories for data analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane,

2006). It has been argued that thematic analysis facilitates the flexible analysis of unstructured data collected from different sources for answering the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It requires thorough data review and examination (Bowen, 2009). Bearing in mind the importance of considering the unit of analysis merged in one method and integrating it with the findings of other methods to eliminate biases (Bowen, 2009). As a data analysis technique, it has many advantages in qualitative research, such as flexibility, the ability to summarise large data sets, reach insightful findings, and inform policy design (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.37).

Using this technique to analyse qualitative data was useful to pick up unobtrusive beliefs and understandings about the topic being studied from the research sample (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Besides, it enabled finding commonalities and patterns in the participants' responses to capture rich and intriguing ideas that help to vividly describe the context and phenomenon being studied (Boyatzis, cited in Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Given that the primary role of qualitative research was "not to develop certain or general theories, but to understand particulars." (Brinkmann, 2014, p.721), this type of analysis facilitated the offering of rich narratives about the data analysed.

The generated codes from the data analysis influenced the focus of the interviews and the thematic analysis of the collective data sets. It was important to integrate all the methods and their findings at every stage to answer the research questions. Integration facilitated all the research parts' interdependence to reach a common objective (Yin, 2006). In the interviews, the participants were asked about the data codes and themes from the content analysis. It has been argued that giving voice to the research participants at the early stages of data collection, analysis, and the reporting of findings enabled the detection of new ideas and themes to reach solid findings (Gioia, Corley and Hamilton, 2013). The codes and the themes were developed gradually and were checked and revisited at every stage in the data collection and analysis process. Finally, the thematic analysis of the participants' experiences and ideas supported the development of vivid policy direction regarding how accountability could be improved in schools from the challenges and implementation gaps.

4.9 Research Credibility, Transferability, and Trustworthiness

Research validity is a requirement in qualitative and quantitative research (Golafshani, 2003; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017; Winter, 2000); without it, any research would be

"worthless" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2002, p.133). Both validity and reliability have been defined and used interchangeably by researchers; however, many researchers agree that while validity is concerned with accuracy, reliability is more focused on replicability (Winter, 2000, p.3). According to Golafshani (2003, p.600), validity and reliability in qualitative research cannot be addressed separately as in quantitative research; they are highly dependent on the researcher's effort instead of constructing the instruments as in quantitative research. Thus, the debate related to the legitimacy and quality of qualitative research continues, and the criteria for assessing its validity and reliability have not been agreed upon (Golafshani, 2003; Maxwell, 1992). It has been argued that research quality cannot be achieved by a single method or a set of agreed procedures; it is dependent on the researcher's beliefs and decisions regarding the stage where validation is necessary (Winter, 2000).

Research has indicated that there will always be some kind of threat regarding the rigour and quality of qualitative research that can never be addressed entirely (Anney, 2014; Shenton, 2004; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2002). However, researchers tend to address both validity and reliability in qualitative research by focusing on the research transferability or generalisability, credibility, and trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004; Golafshani, 2003). According to Guba's construct, internal validity corresponds with credibility in qualitative research, while external validity lies in its ability to be generalisable/ transferable to other contexts (Guba, 1981). The application of methods to ensure the research credibility and transferability in qualitative research increases its trustworthiness. Therefore, several procedures were implemented from the early stages of writing the research to ensure its credibility and transferability.

i. Research credibility

Credibility in qualitative research relates to the level of accuracy and vividness in answering the research questions; it corresponds with internal validity in quantitative research (Shenton, 2004). It is believed that credibility contributes to the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Lincon and Guba, 1985) as referenced by (Shenton, 2004). It is relative to the perspective and understanding of the researchers or the community they represent (Maxwell, 1992). Extended field investigation, reflexivity, content checking, peer review, and triangulation are examples of research credibility strategies in qualitative research (Anney, 2014). Besides, it has been argued that spending sufficient time to understand the context and the issue of study contributes to its credibility (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007). Therefore, the

researcher chose a broad topic of interest (accountability in education) and studied it in Qatari Independent schools, a familiar context to the researcher who has been an educator in the system since 2006. Besides, the research evolved over two years period and was conducted in stages following an intentional sequence as shown previously in Figure 2.

Moreover, the data analysis was conducted in stages as well to validate the findings before moving to the following stage which contributed to its credibility as shown in Figure 3. An array of documents related to the topic were collected and analysed including press articles and official letters to schools to capture the finest details regarding accountability in school. To further enhance the research credibility, an array of participants were chosen to explore the issue of study from various perspectives and minimise biases. Also, direct quotes from the participants were used to provide an accurate presentation of their views and the applications of accountability as they experienced it. It was necessary to select participants who experienced accountability differently according to their job title, encourage them to share their ideas and suggestions openly, and invite them to validate some of the research findings. Looking at the topic from the view of officials and comparing it to the views of teachers and school leaders enabled deep analysis of the issue to accurately capture the accountability relationships in the system.

It has been argued that to develop credible constructs that genuinely speak for the research subjects; the constructs must be of value to them and demonstrate their authentic experience and interpretations of it (Eisenhart and Howe, 1992). Hence, the data collection and analysis process had to be "thorough, inclusive, and comprehensive" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.36).

ii. Research transferability

Transferability is achieved by comparing the findings with other research findings that share similar aims or tackle the same issues for agreement (Mays and Pope, 1995; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). Research has indicated that transferability in any research adds to its significance; it is highly important especially in qualitative research (Winter, 2000). It is defined by Maxwell (1992, p. 293) as the ability to extend the findings of studying a particular issue or phenomenon to other times, settings, and contexts. It relates to the usefulness of the research outcomes in understanding other populations, contexts, or issues (Shenton, 2004; Maxwell, 1992).

Qualitative research findings guide the development of generalisable theories that could be used to understand other contexts (Winter, 2000). It has been argued that by providing detailed descriptions of the phenomenon being studied and its context, researchers open the door for others to utilise their findings by comparing them to similar contexts of concern (Schofield, 1990). Winter (2000, p.6) argues that "qualitative research almost exclusively limits itself to internal generalisations, if indeed it seeks to claim any form of generalisability at all". Although, the research focused on reaching concrete findings that keenly describe accountability and its applications in the Qatari context. Nevertheless, the popularity of the topic would support external transferability efforts as well. The detailed description of the context of the study at Qatari Independent schools in Chapter 2 and the participants in Chapter 4 may enable the readers to transfer the information and findings to other similar contexts. To further amplify the research transferability, evidence from various literature about other education systems that experienced similar reforms was used to emphasise points made by the research participants.

In research that aims to understand human-related issues or contexts, it is effective to adopt selective sampling techniques (Marshall, 1996). Thus, the sampling for the interviews was made with much consideration to the experience of the selected sample and the roles they play in Qatar's education. An array of individuals who played distinct roles in Qatar's education were interviewed to arrive at solid descriptions of the issue. Research has indicated that the considerate choice of the sample in qualitative research minimises biases that emerge in random or convenient sampling (Marshall, 1996). The sampling process must not intentionally neglect any of the key individuals or groups in the context being studied (Mays and Pope, 1995). When the research participants provide deep and rich responses in the interviews, they contribute positively to the research validity and reliability (Silverman, 1993). Moreover, the participants were interviewed in stages to develop preliminary theories and refine them at every stage as more participants were interviewed. It suggests that the theories developed from data analysis guide the selection of the new sample to build on the previous findings (Marshall, 1996).

Moreover, the research findings were authenticated by evidence from related recent literature in the discussion of findings in Chapter 6. By doing a wide literature investigation, researchers can correlate their work with other constructs and measures about the issue (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2002). It is preferable to objectively verify as well as falsify a researcher's construct with evidence from the literature. When the researcher's evidence is

balanced between agreement and disagreement from literature, he or she can rationalise the validity of the work and add more value to literature (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2002). Furthermore, three key reports were used to validate the research findings: (1) the 2017/8 UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report: Accountability in Education; (2) the 2014 World Bank's Review of School Autonomy and Accountability; and (3) the 2004 World Bank's World Development Report: Making Services Work for Poor People. The reports provide rigorous, comprehensive, and universal analysis of accountability in education from studying many contexts.

It has been argued that in qualitative research, the researcher's bias and perspective tend to affect the research ability to be transferable; thus, it is of high importance to ensure the researcher's truthfulness and accuracy of discussion (Denzin, 1978). To address that, all the interviews were transcribed and audio-recorded, coded, and documented. Member checking was used to provide their feedback regarding the made interpretations and findings from the interviews. During interviews, participants were asked about the findings from the previous interviews. Upon the completion of the interviews, some participants were sent copies of the findings for verification. Moreover, three educational experts were interviewed at the final stage of data collection to validate the findings from the content analysis and interviews. Their responses contributed to minimising the researcher's biases and increased the trustworthiness of the findings. In addition, the connections made between the content analysis findings and the interviews limited the biases and increased the accuracy of the final results. All this, I believe, increased the rigour of the research methods and their results.

4.10 Triangulation

Triangulation is the application of two or more data collection methods in a single study (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2002); it is a robust tool for validity in qualitative research (Campbell and Fiske, 1959). It has been argued that researchers need to produce honest, vivid, and rich data that speaks directly to the research aims through triangulation and objective inquiry (Winter, 2000). Triangulation is a quality assurance technique that enables the researcher to validate findings and minimise bias (Anney, 2014). Triangular methods in qualitative research portray the depth and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from different angles (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2002, p.141). Research has indicated that triangulation is an evaluative strategy in qualitative research that increases the trustworthiness

of the research findings (Mathison, 1988). The use of triangulation helps explain thoroughly the divergent behaviour of individuals from different viewpoints. By using a multi-method approach, the researcher feels confident about the research findings and provides transferable information to other contexts and situations (Anney, 2014).

In the thesis, triangulation was used to quality assure the research results and validate the findings of the data analysis. The researcher verified the findings from the content analysis using semi-structured interviews. Association between the emerging themes from both methods highlighted common themes that informed the discussion of the research results. During the final stage of the interviews, there was a set of recognisable themes; yet, data collection and analysis continued until the arrival to a saturation point. The educational experts who were purposefully interviewed at the final stage of the data collection were asked about some of the themes that emerged from the data analysis for further validity and objective judgement (Mays and Pope, 1995). The repetition of the themes generated from the data analysis was also carefully considered by giving more weight to the most repeated themes. Those themes were supported by evidence from the collected data and literature. The procedures contributed tremendously in the research's trustworthiness and rigour.

Findings of the investigations of accountability in Qatari Independent schools were married to the conceptual framework developed by looking at different accountability models to construct new meaning from data and develop policy recommendations. Consequently, the research recommendations were developed to assist officials and policymakers in Qatar regarding how to improve governance and enhance accountability practices that positively impact the performance of Qatar's education. The policy recommendations provided a framework that included suggested mechanisms and procedures for effectively applying accountability in Qatari schools.

4.11 Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted following the highest levels of ethical considerations. It was important that participants were aware of the research process and voluntarily agreed to participate; therefore the participants were granted voluntary participation in the research. Interview aims and questions were shared with all the participants in advance (BERA, 2018). Additionally, a consent form was signed by all the participants, and the researcher affirmed the confidentiality of the data collected and the anonymity of the people interviewed. Due to the

sensitivity of the topic, it was critical that MEHE officials and school leaders felt comfortable talking openly about the topic. Moreover, it was important not to hint or direct the participants during the interviews, and provide them with an emotionally safe environment to express their views and opinions. Thus, the researcher conducted the interviews in a relaxed environment, where the participants felt free to talk without worry or feeling threatened. Besides, the interview questions were developed objectively, without any reference to previously formed opinions about accountability in Qatar's education. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted at the space and time of preference to the participants. For example, some participants preferred to conduct the interview using online applications, while others preferred face-to-face interaction. Research has indicated that debriefing the participants with research findings was considered a favourable act (BERA, 2018). Therefore, some of the participants were given a briefing of the interview results and permission to discuss them freely.

Data collection for the research was conducted considering that there was a risk of perceiving the researcher as an evaluator or an inspector; especially when interviewing the participants from the Ministry and schools. Discussing a controversial topic like accountability might have made some decision-makers feel threatened and avoid judgment by truth manipulation. On the other hand, there was a risk of perceiving interviews in qualitative research in a therapeutic sense. For example, some participants tend to view the researcher as a counselor who would solve their problems and make a positive difference in their lives (Rossetto, 2014). That scenario was expected to happen when interviewing the participants from the schools, who would consider the researcher as a solver to all their work problems. Therefore, clear communication of the research aims was essential and ethically critical. The participants were assured of the researcher's objectivity and the confidentiality of the data gathered.

The purpose and procedures of the study were clearly explained to the participants through a signed consent form and they were also offered an opportunity to ask questions. Before the interview, participants' right to withdraw at any point in the study was explained. Therefore, participants were not obligated to continue participating if they were no longer interested (Adams and Cox, 2008). Permission to audio record interviews was obtained. Furthermore, participants were assured that their names would remain anonymous and all the information received from them would be treated, stored, and reported with confidentiality. As a further ethical consideration, the qualitative data in this study was not identified by the

respondents' names but rather represented by codes. The study, therefore, was conducted with respect to the dignity of the informants (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012).

One area of concern was that school teachers might have felt obliged to participate and that their answers might be biased in that they might have provided responses that reflected what their school administrators would want them to say or what they thought I would prefer them to state, instead of their perceptions. I clearly explained to the teachers that choosing to participate in this research study was voluntary. I assured them that the information participants would provide would not be used to evaluate their work or affect their job and would not be reported to their school administrators. All the qualitative data was analysed and securely stored. Also, the data was not used or accessed by any other individual. A copy of the overall findings would be submitted to the decision-makers in the MEHE to offer recommendations for the improvement of the decision-making system in Qatari schools.

According to the 'Scientific Research in Education' report issued by the National Research Council in (2002, p.52), any scientific research must abide by a number of key principles that emphasise "objectivity, rigorous thinking, open-mindedness, and honest and thorough reporting." Thus, maintaining high levels of objectivity and professionalism was a priority in all the stages of the research.

4.12 Limitations of the Research

The research intended to provide a holistic view of accountability as perceived and applied by policymakers and educators working in Qatari schools. It looked at various documents that informed and directed accountability mechanisms implemented in Qatar's Independent schools. It also examined how those mechanisms were perceived and implemented on the ground. However, it did not cover the implications of the accountability mechanisms on the system's performance in detail. For example, the research did not investigate the relationship between the accountability policies on students' achievement or schools' performance, nor did it correlate with certain policies and their influence on the system's performance.

The research's primary subject was government schools and the way they were governed by the SEC in Qatar. The private schools in Qatar had different governing structures that were not examined for the research. In addition, the research did not look at diverse

elements of governance that include financial funding, equity, and the quality of the system. It also did not cover other issues that generally influence any reform, such as the organisational culture, institutional capacity, and the social context.

The research focused on accountability mechanisms implemented following the ENE reform starting from 2002 until 2016. Policies and mechanisms used to hold schools accountable before and after that were out of the picture. With that in mind, this research examined accountability from the perspective of policymakers through official documents and interviews with stakeholders charged with implementation. The purpose was to investigate how accountability was perceived, implemented and the gaps that plagued the system.

5. Chapter Five: Research Findings

5.1 Introduction

Qatar has experienced a paradigm-shifting educational reform to diversify its economic scene and create a knowledge-based economy (Nasser, 2017; Khodr, 2011; Anderson, Alnaimi and Alhajri, 2010). A wealthy and small state like Qatar provided the best context to experiment with the feasibility of implementing some of the recently trending principles in education like choice, accountability, and autonomy (Guarino and Tanner, 2012). Qatar was the first country in the Arab world to implement standardised measures and tools to hold schools accountable (Ben Jaafar, 2011). The ENE reform triggered several pressing questions regarding what worked, what did not, and why. The intensity and the scope of the changes that Qatari government schools experienced over the past fifteen years made Qatar's education a very attractive research context. Thus, the research aimed to look at accountability as a principle sought by many education systems worldwide as it was implemented in Qatari Independent schools.

5.2 Stakeholder Perceptions of Accountability

i. Stakeholder definition of accountability

To answer the first research question and elicit the perceptions of the research participants regarding accountability, the interview included questions about how they would define the term and why they think it was important in education. All the research participants, regardless of their position or professional experience, had a consensus regarding what accountability as a governing principle generally meant. Their definitions of the term did not differ from definitions found in the literature; it was primarily about being fully responsible for their actions and the consequences of those actions.

There were common keywords that the participants used to define the term that included: responsibility, goals, results, control, evaluation, indicators, and quality. Despite their varying backgrounds and experiences, as highlighted in the previous chapter, their understanding of the term leaned more towards the institutional (or operational) aspect than the moral or personal aspect. For instance, the majority of the MEHE officials and educational experts focused on goals and outcomes in their definitions.

A school evaluation expert (MEHE2) defined accountability as "the extent to which the individual bears responsibility for the work and tasks assigned to him." It is directly related to executing tasks and adhering to rules. A similar definition was given by an organisational monitoring expert (SME3) who emphasised institutional performance, monitoring, and answerability in his definition. He explained:

> "Accountability is showing the results of the performance of a person or institution to the same person or institution and making these results the responsibility of this entity or person."

On the other hand, it was anticipated that teachers and school leaders would develop definitions that leaned more towards the personal value or obligations that usually surround the term. Surprisingly, they provided definitions that focused on accountability as an institutional practice as well. For example, a school teacher (T1) said:

> "It is the fact of being reliable and responsible of what you do and at the same time to give a satisfactory reason for your actions in the educational system."

The teacher's definition emphasised the aspect of answerability and justifying conduct. On the other hand, a school leader (SL1) explained that accountability was about "the effective administrative control and taking responsibility." Compared to the teacher's perspective of the term, the leader's perspective leaned more on control and monitoring conduct.

To the research participants, accountability was primarily about adhering to rules and regulations. The definitions above confirm some common features of accountability discussed in the literature review; for instance, it is interactive and demands answerability for actions (Mashaw, 2006; Bovens, 2005; Muglan, 2000; Romzek and Dubnick, 1998; Jones, 1992). However, the definitions given by educators working in schools differed in focus in comparison to RAND's philosophy which was "based on outcomes and performance rather than rules" (Brewer et al., 2007, p.53).

ii. Importance of accountability in education

In the interviews, there was no disagreement regarding the importance of accountability as a principle for governing schools. Its importance lied in its ability to ensure delivering good

educational services for all students, achieving intended outcomes, and improving performance.

a. Achieving intended outcomes

In the interviews, the participants explained that being responsible is a personal value, and ideally, everyone must be accountable for their conduct. However, they argued that accountability systems help to standardise people's behaviour and lead to achieving institutional goals. Also, they argued that accountability ensures the fulfilment of roles and responsibilities at the school or the system level.

In the interviews, educators working in schools appreciated the introduction of accountability to enhance institutional performance in the system. For instance, a school leader (SL2) confirmed that:

> "It judges how much you are in the right track towards achieving your goals, or how far you deviated from the goals you have set, or the Ministry has set for all the schools."

It was interesting to see advanced institutional thinking from school leaders, which confirmed the impact of the reform on improving their practices in managing schools and leading change. On the other hand, teachers felt that accountability mechanisms encouraged good behaviour, one teacher said (T2) that "when we are accountable ourselves, we take a step to improve our lives. Accountability lead to higher quality and even higher productivity." Similarly, another teacher explained that the impact of accountability is tremendous; (T1) believed that:

> "It's going to be reflected on the student's results. It's going to be reflected on the education system… is going to be reflected on the outcomes of the educational plans."

All the participants strongly believed that government institutions, schools, and teachers would not fulfil their roles and achieve intended goals without accountability. In general, their responses emphasised the role of accountability in clarifying what is expected from others, enhancing ownership of behaviour, and the individuals' sense of responsibility and belonging to their institutions.

Similarly, MEHE officials believed that accountability was crucial to monitor the implementation of plans and the attainment of goals. A student evaluation expert (MEHE7) explained:

> "It should be the end result...to make sure that the study and the education has happened and the subjects have been taught and the expected education has already taken place."

She believed that accountability was needed to follow up on the progress of students and ensure they were learning in schools. All the participants acknowledged the role of accountability in the fulfilment of educational goals. The above is supported by (Figlio and Loeb, 2011) who argue that accountability mechanisms in education make monitoring the performance of all schools possible.

b. Controlling performance

The interview participants indicated that implementing robust accountability mechanisms minimised human errors and ensured that officials did not misuse their authority. They explained that when Independent schools implemented accountability mechanisms, it decreased the occurrence of some negative behaviour like cheating and manipulation. For example, an educational expert explained (SME2) that:

> "Holding one person accountable through a system will encourage people to eliminate negative conduct. It will attract others to join the institution…(it is) a disciplinary action against bad conduct."

Similarly, a former reform consultant (SME1) explained that by implementing accountability mechanisms, "you minimise the damage and maximise the benefit of the employee." From the point of view of educational experts, more accountability equals less misconduct and better performance. Moreover, all the experts confirmed in the interviews that accountability helped to raise the system's efficiency and effectiveness.

On the other hand, the school leaders believed that accountability had to be a primary principle in the design and implementation of the ENE reform to ensure that Independent schools fulfilled their roles while being autonomous. It was necessary to implement a set of accountability tools by the SEC to counteract the central control of the former MOE; especially that government schools enjoyed unfamiliar independent status. Both teachers and

school leaders confirmed that institutional policies and procedures during the ENE reform had to intervene to control the quality of school performance towards goal achievement. They strongly believed that institutional accountability systems helped to standardise people's behaviour. They explained that the absence of controls and audits at the beginning of the reform encouraged bad behaviours, including tardiness, manipulation, and low productivity. In the interviews, both teachers and school leaders recognised the importance of being held accountable. A school leader (SL1) explained:

> "To ensure that everyone is working following the same frameworks and systems suggested in the short and long terms, there has to be accountability procedures that enable institutions to hold the person accountable."

On the other hand, it was expected that teachers would have a different point of view. However, teachers also confirmed the importance of accountability in improving their performance. One teacher (T2) explained:

> "When people are accountable, they think to fix or improve a situation…When people are accountable for the work, they do their best. When you raise accountability for sure, we are going to raise productivity."

iii. Features of Sound Accountability Systems

The analysis of the participants' responses revealed several overlapping and common ideas discussed in the literature about features of sound accountability in educational systems. These include clear goals, clear roles and mandates, continuous audits, and strong leadership.

a. Clearly defined goals and targets

The participants emphasised that accountability is directly linked to the institution's mission and strategic goals. Meaning that institutional performance must be monitored using indicators and tools to evaluate the achievement of the agreed goals. Without a well-structured plan or vision with clear objectives, it is impossible to hold people accountable in any institution effectively. A former high-level educational expert (SME4) explained that "the strategic plan can be an essential part of accountability." He indicated that the plan must be linked to the success of the system. Meaning, the plan objectives and targets have to link to the overall system vision and direction. Yet, (SME4) confirmed that "the definition of success must be related to targets."

Similarly, MEHE officials and school leaders acknowledged the necessity of having a clear path related to the institution's mandate to implement accountability. For example, they suggested that schools need to have a list of yearly success indicators and realistic targets at the individual school level that stems from the system's goals. School leaders explained that the ENE reform introduced them to positive institutional practices they did not perform before the reform such as developing annual plans and conducting internal self-reviews. As one school leader explained (SL2):

> "It's about the freedom of decision that the schools had in terms of recruitment, in terms of budgeting, in terms of resourcing for the students, of course, and for the teachers as well… And having that kind of openness in terms of the curriculum standards, so the schools decided what to do, how deep they go into these standards. They set their objectives. They put the process that helps them to reach these objectives. And eventually it was clear whether or not they managed to reach these objectives. And I think this is the core of accountability."

Another high-level official (MEHE1) confirmed that the interdependence among the various constituents calls for the development of clear expectations and plans. She emphasised:

> "Responsibility starts from the teacher and the school administration up to the educational inspectors and the various departments of the Ministry of Education. The responsibility cannot be assigned to a specific party, but it is a cumulative responsibility between all parties and the guarantor is proper planning."

Simply put, it is about developing goals and making sure they are achieved. Meaning, people need to know they are accountable for what; thus, every system must develop a set of clear expectations and attainable targets. In one of the early works about the issue, Frymier (1996, p. 44) wrote, "legislators must develop accountability mechanisms that measure the fulfilment of goal attainment and enhance improvement."

b. Clear roles and mandates

The interview participants explained the importance of having clearly defined roles and responsibilities to guide their practices. They asserted that the clarity of expectations enable individuals to focus their efforts on what mattered. In the interviews, the school leaders

expressed that clarity of expectations must come before holding people accountable. they argued it would be unfair to hold teachers accountable without explaining the expectations in advance. They indicated that clarity could be achieved through defining goals, assigning roles, and clarifying the expected quality standards. Also, school leaders believed that when expectations are clear, they promote a stronger sense of responsibility and motivation among staff. Similarly, some MEHE officials explained that people tend to either underperform or make more mistakes without clear roles. About the impact of lack of clarity on an individual's behaviour, a current school evaluation expert (MEHE5) explained that "people don't have buy-in…It is not because they're bad…it's because they don't understand." The participant strongly felt that if Independent schools were provided with clear expectations, the outcomes of the reform would have been better. Her opinion was supported by (MEHE1) who strongly believed in the role of clarity and simplicity in making accountability mechanisms more effective. She confirmed that:

> "It is imperative that the implementation of smart educational accountability be pursued with a clear approach in educational institutions, which depend on the principles of transparency, trust, and commitment…These practices depend on a set of tools such as policies and job descriptions specified for employees."

The same idea was also emphasised by the educational experts interviewed at the final stage; for instance, one participant (SME1) talked about the relationship between clarity and motivation. She explained, "people have clear roles and responsibilities that would enable them to be willing to work." She believed that clarity would raise the satisfaction and sense of belonging among employees in the institution.

c. Continuous self-reviews and audits

Both MEHE officials and school leaders believed that the structure of Independent schools promoted school-level accountability and facilitated the implementation of good institutional practices. The school leaders interviewed had a decent understanding of accountability and how it should be implemented at the school level. They explained that at the beginning of the reform schools had complete autonomy and operated as private institutions. Also, they implemented effective mechanisms in their schools that included: developing yearly plans, conducting annual and monthly reviews, monitoring practices at the department and teacher level, and regularly following up and reporting on progress. Similarly,

teachers appreciated the formative nature of some of the school level reviews introduced in Independent schools, (T1) explained that:

> "Usually the continuous follow-up during the year for me is better because it's coming on the spot all the time like I'm not waiting until the end of the year."

There was a consensus that the annual self-review introduced by the SEC was a positive practice; for example (MEHE6) confirmed:

> "One of the positives of the Supreme Council stage was spreading the culture of self-evaluation and annual self-review. The school is supposed to have planned it based on its own review."

However, MEHE officials argued that school leaders did not have the needed capacity to perform the self-reviews successfully especially at the beginning of the reform. Three school evaluation experts thought that Independent schools did not fully absorb the aim behind the annual self-reviews and considered them a procedural burden to check off at the end of the year. Moreover, some schools did not provide credible information in their reviews and usually developed cosmetic reports.

d. Good leadership

In the interviews, the participants explained that leadership and institutional culture played a role in promoting accountability in any system. Both teachers and school leaders explained that the degree of accountability changed from one school to another, according to the principal's vision and leadership style. For example, one of the teachers explained that she felt more accountable to her current principal than the previous one because of her follow-up, commitment, and focus. On the other hand, school leaders also emphasised that the principal practices affected the level of commitment in the school. (SL2) revealed that to enhance accountability:

> "You need to implement that kind of culture in the school, setting the goals ahead of everyone and explaining the roles and responsibilities, and making sure everybody knows the roles and responsibilities, including the students."

Another school leader confirmed that her role required clarifying expectations, monitoring performance, and supporting all her staff before holding them accountable. To enhance trust in schools (SL3) commented, "always when monitoring performance you need

to be transparent, have communication channels and provide support and guidance." In the interviews, all the school leaders believed that the commitment of all the school members started from the principal. They recognised that their role was vital to make accountability work.

The educational experts also believed in the power of leadership in influencing how institutions operate. For instance, (SME1) confirmed that what leaders focus on guides the work of the institution; she explained that:

> "It is so important to choose the leader at any level because the culture of the institution…it is always influenced…coloured by the culture of the people in the top."

Similarly, (SME3) explained that follow-up is more effective when it is led or supported by the senior leaders, he confirmed that "the indicators and commitment of people is promoted by the culture."

In summary, accountability as a principle to promote the performance of schools is highly valued and supported by all the participants. The synergy and high compatibility in the research participants' responses reveal consistency in the messages received by the participants regarding the general aims of accountability as a principle in Independent schools.

5.3 Accountability Mechanisms to Hold Schools Accountable

The ENE reform experienced many changes over the years until it was officially abolished in 2016 with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education's restructuring to announce the return of the Ministry of Education's central control over schools. Although much of the former reform's principles such as autonomy and choice were no longer relevant; yet, accountability remained a primary principle that aligned with the regained centralised governance of schools. To reach reliable answers to the second research question, the participants were asked to name the tools implemented by the SEC to hold schools accountable, and what they were accountable for. The responses were analysed in comparison to the content of the documents to identify similarities and differences.

There was no agreement regarding the tools used for holding schools accountable; while schools emphasised some tools, MEHE officials gave weight to other ones. The responses varied between the participants according to their job title and experience. For instance, the teachers described the tools their coordinators and principals applied. On the other hand, school leaders focused on what the SEC inspectors requested from them. The document analysis and interviews revealed that there were many core and supporting tools for holding schools accountable that varied in their purpose and aims.

The analysis also revealed that there was a chasm between the policies and their implementation in Independent schools. At the data analysis stage, it was necessary to revisit some of RAND's earlier reports (Gonzalez et al., 2009; Zellman et al., 2009; Brewer et. al., 2007) to compare between the intended accountability model and how the accountability systems unfolded and evolved.

There was a consensus among all that the current accountability tools were comprehensive; however, clarity regarding what was expected from schools was needed. Thus, to reach a reasonable answer to the second research question, a list of all the accountability mechanisms was developed. The identified accountability mechanisms were organised under two main sections: core and supporting accountability tools. The core mechanisms were tools originally suggested by RAND and many education systems apply to hold schools accountable such as fiscal audits, standardised assessments, and school evaluations. The supporting mechanisms were tools that enhanced good conduct when applied but were not intended to implement accountability. They include professional standards and the school structures. The implementation of the reform plans revealed several key findings regarding the efficacy of those tools. For instance, teachers and school leaders emphasised accountability tools such as SEC inspections and self-reviews compared to other core ones in the policy documents such as standardised assessments.

The below section provides a detailed discussion of each accountability tool supported by evidence from the research data and literature for further validation.

5.3.1 Core Accountability Tools

i. Fiscal audits

The Regulatory Handbook for Operating Independent Schools revealed that the SEC implemented financial audits to ensure compliance of school operators in exchange for their

autonomy. The document stated that "schools will be held financially accountable to the Education Institute based on their contracts, budgets, and the rules and guidelines of the Finance Office" (Supreme Education Council, 2006b, p.5). The SEC's Finance Office conducted external audits of the schools' spending and financial records. The SEC also developed policies and procedures for internal financial reviews to be performed by schools. The procedures included annual budget calendars and an automated accounting system to record the schools' expenses. In addition, schools were asked to submit periodic reports for the Finance Office in the SEC (Guarino and Tanner, 2012).

The Regulatory Handbook contained detailed procedures for operating schools independently. It required some complicated tasks from school operators that include market analysis, business plans, operational budgets, asset management plans, procurement policies, and staffing regulations. Also, schools were required to adhere to three forms of monitoring: monthly internal audits, quarterly/ annual regulatory audits by the SEC, and annual external audits by an external audit firm (Supreme Education Council, 2006b).

Due to their new independent status, school principals found themselves responsible for a wide range of tasks that they were not accustomed to including: recruitment, building maintenance, and budgeting. A school principal revealed that the SEC's focus was more on making sure they were good administrators. A considerable amount of their time was allocated to writing reports and justifying their spending decisions. Two of the school leaders explained that the majority of their school day was spent working on procurement procedures, contracting suppliers, and adhering to auditing requirements. (SL1) explained:

> "The most accountability was implemented in the financial aspect…It was quarterly. Principals must have reports and budget tables with procedures…We were requested to have an external auditor besides the SEC, so we were accountable for two entities."

On the other hand, interviews with teachers revealed they were not involved in those processes and had little knowledge about the financial matters of their schools. Some MEHE officials also did not mention the fiscal audits as they were implemented by external agencies hired by the Finance Office at the time.

ii. Qatar's Comprehensive Education Assessments (QCEA)

The QCEA was one of the core tools implemented during the ENE reform for holding schools accountable: it was "at the heart of the reform" as reported by RAND (Zellman et al., 2011, p.144). The data collected from the QCEA was incorporated in three reports issued by the Evaluation Institute: student reports, classroom reports, and national reports (Supreme Education Council, 2007a). The QCEA assessments (also called National Assessments) were initially introduced to schools as an objective tool to measure students' performance in the new curriculum standards. They were designed to improve school performance and enhance choice in the system (Zellman et al., 2011). Later policy documents refocused the tests' purpose as a tool to hold schools accountable (Ben Jaafar, 2011). In a press interview (Supreme Education Council, 2007a, p.13), the former Evaluation Institute Director clarified:

> "The key message of the reform is that principals must be accountable for his or her school's performance. We will provide support and services, but the role of the Evaluation Institute is to disseminate information and objectively analyse the results."

Surprisingly, there was no agreement in the responses of teachers and school leaders regarding its effectiveness and role in holding them accountable. The teachers did not consider the assessments to be of much importance in holding schools accountable. Two teachers explained that teachers and parents thought that the tests were ambitious, ambiguous, and did not trust their validity. It was unexpected to find that teachers felt that the standardised assessments had little impact on informing their instructional practices and holding them to account. (T2) explained "we don't even know as teachers what they're going to focus on. And sometimes it is above students' level. It's not measuring the students' improvement." Surprisingly, a student evaluation official (MEHE7) confirmed that the assessments were developed according to the very ambitious curriculum standards. She explained:

> "We have curriculum standards and those standards I can say that they are too much high in level than the current situation and what we have in schools... But what's happening in schools was shocking because nobody could answer our question. And this is our first obstacle."

It has been argued that aligning the assessments to curriculum standards was challenging in the United States because of the broad nature of the standards in comparison to the specific nature of the tests (Shaftel, 2010). Moreover, Copp (2019) confirmed that

teachers usually do not agree regarding the use of standardised assessments in the accountability systems implemented in their schools. He explained that accountability policies tend to be ambiguous to teachers and did not directly link to their daily practice.

The policy documents revealed some inconsistencies regarding the assessment objectives and the utilisation of the student results. Although the policy explicitly identified the tests as a core tool for accountability, other supporting procedures did not follow. The student evaluation policy did not include procedures to reward or sanction schools according to their students' performance in the national assessments; which was also confirmed in Guarino and Tanner (2012) and Ben Jafaar (2011) studies.

All the school leaders interviewed were frustrated because of the absence of clear policies to acknowledge their efforts in improving their students' performance in the QCEA. They explained that some schools received some incentives despite their low performance in the QCEA; thus, many schools did not feel motivated to improve with time. For instance, high performing schools were not rewarded for their efforts in raising students' performance, and were sometimes treated equally to low-performing ones. One school leader (SL2) confirmed that the QCEA was an effective tool, but needed further utilisation. She explained:

> "It was actually an amazing tool for having a clear picture of how all the schools in the same grade level was doing…But before that, you can never tell whether things are done in the right way. Also, having these national exams, as they were called, was a very clear image of how the school is really doing or whether the school is really doing things right. But the problem was with making use of the data."

The school leader strongly believed that the assessment results were not fully utilised to reward or sanction schools. This was supported by a former student evaluation official (MEHE7) who explained:

> "Sanctions and rewards have to have a clear shape in order to make people just work harder…But not having any regulations in place, we will get nowhere because there is no objective."

The chasm between both institutes contributed to the low utilisation of the QCEA results. For example, it was clear from the interviews that all the teachers and school leaders felt more obligated to abide by the Education Institute inspectors' expectations rather than the

evaluations implemented by the Evaluation Institute. That was evident when asked to list what and who they felt accountable for, the QCEA assessments usually were mentioned at the end. It was probably because of two reasons: (1) the formative nature of the school inspections compared to the summative nature of the evaluations, and (2) the absence of consequential procedures that relate to the school's performance in the tests. To support that, a former MEHE official confirmed that accountability was emphasised through formative means rather than summative ones. She explained that the aim was to nurture a culture of self-assessment and encourage schools to review their work for continuous improvement.

On the other hand, MEHE evaluation officials believed that the QCEA assessments were one of the core tools for accountability, however, issues related to institutional capacity affected the utilisation of them for holding schools to account. The student evaluation official (MEHE7) explained that many of the consulting companies did not train the SEC staff on how to set and analyse the assessments. So when the companies finished their work, the department did not know how to perform those tasks. She also added that "teachers and schools need more practice. They do not know how to set an exam. They don't know how to put the question." She believed that the capacity limitations in the SEC and schools were one of the main reasons for the inconsistent implementation of the QCEA.

More recent editions of the students' evaluation policy did not explicitly state that the assessments would be used for accountability. For example, in the Grade Three Student Evaluation System document, the policy specified that the objective was to "support, direct, and enhance students' learning according to their abilities" and that the assessments would enable schools to use the students' performance data to "determine the type of treatment plans they need in subsequent grades" (Supreme Education Council, 2016, p.6). The document did not clarify how schools would be accountable for their students' performance; it only listed the examination procedures and assessment weights.

iii. School Evaluations

According to the School Evaluation Office in the SEC, the school evaluations aimed to "achieve sound educational accountability, and at the same time contribute to enhancing autonomy and diversity" (Supreme Education Council, 2010, p.5). The evaluations were conducted every three years to ensure schools' adherence to SEC policies and regulations; and be conducted in two consequent years in some exceptional cases (Supreme Education Council, 2010). It was evident from the school evaluation reports and relevant documents that

the school evaluations used comprehensive tools that gave a holistic view of the school performance that included: a review of school portfolios, interviews, class observations, inspections, student results, and the annual report cards. Following that, the evaluation results were shared with the schools and the parents. The reports contained a review of the school's performance in the QCEA assessments and a descriptive analysis of the school performance in the evaluation indicators. Also, the reports contained a list of improvement priorities and recommendations. The school evaluation officials interviewed affirmed that the criteria used for evaluating schools was very ambitious and utilised the use of school performance data.

In the interviews, all the school leaders reported that the criteria used for school evaluation was well developed, and contained good indicators because of the valuable input from western companies. Moreover, school leaders explained that the evaluation reports were helpful to identify their improvement priorities. However, they all agreed that there were four problems with the evaluations. First, the SEC inspectors who performed the evaluations were not well trained. Second, the implementation of the policy was not consistent and many schools were not evaluated according to plan. Third, just like the QCEA results, there was little utilisation of the evaluation results in other policies and procedures. Fourth, the school evaluations depended on paper evidence and did not reflect the authentic performance of the schools. One school leader (SL1) explained:

> "The school evaluation was very important. The problem in the beginning was the evaluation teams received only two weeks of training before starting to evaluate schools. The teams were weak."

When asked about the above problems, three school evaluation officials confirmed that they encountered those challenges and that the policy went through many revisions over the past fifteen years to address them. One school evaluation official clarified that the evaluation standards were developed by western agencies and they did not have time to contextualise them to fit the Qatari context before the implementation. (MEHE2) confirmed that "the standards were adopted from foreign organisations, but they were not suitable nor fair."

Surprisingly, the teachers interviewed had little knowledge about the school evaluation process. When asked about it they either said their school was not evaluated or only the school leaders were directly involved. Two teachers explained that the tool was effective at the school leadership level not the teacher's level. However, one school teacher explained that

due to the summative nature of the evaluations, they provided general guidance that was of little support to her day-to-day work.

iv. School annual self-reviews

The School Self-Review Framework was issued in 2007 and aimed to help schools conduct yearly audits following a set of quality measures and standards. The framework was also implemented to aid both the Education Institute in monitoring schools and the Evaluation Institute in their school evaluations (Supreme Education Council, 2007b). The framework consisted of many quality and performance indicators and was repetitive in some parts. For instance, the quality indicators differed from performance indicators. The quality indicators had a list of supporting indicators, focus areas, examples of evidence, and indicator questions. Likewise, the performance indicators consisted of additional indicators and themes. However, all the indicators revolved around three core priorities: (1) the level of students' progress, (2) students' learning expectations, and (3) improvement priorities (Supreme Education Council, 2007b).

There was consensus among school leaders and MEHE officials regarding the importance of the annual self-reviews. They indicated that it built their capacity in assessing their practices and identifying improvement priorities. The framework emphasised continuous monitoring and did not explicitly focus on accountability. A former official (MEHE4) explained that the philosophy behind introducing some of the accountability tools was to enhance the capacity of Independent schools in positive institutional practices such as self-reviews for continuous improvement.

In the interviews, the school leaders and the school evaluation officials confirmed that it is a primary tool for enhancing accountability at the school level. School teachers also explained that it was an annual activity that helped them identify their strengths and where they need to improve. (T1) confirmed:

> "This is the thing that everybody is waiting for…It's a big thing because it shows me where are the positives of my work where the negatives. Like what are the things that I need to work on and what are the things that I did."

However, some MEHE officials explained that the Ministry inspectors dealt with the self-reviews as one of the procedures checked off at the beginning of the year with little emphasis on investigating the impact of those reviews on their improvement plans.

v. SEC inspections

The SEC's Education Institute was responsible for monitoring the implementation of the curriculum standards and the quality of teaching and learning in schools. It was evident that what the SEC inspectors focused on was a priority to the schools at the time. In the interviews, the teachers expressed that they were accountable for their school leaders and the Education Institute inspectors. On the other hand, school leaders expressed that they were closely monitored by the SEC inspectors who usually required many overlapping and sometimes contradicting requirements. They felt that there was no synergy between the different departments of the SEC and that was reflected in the inspectors' requests. (SL1) emphasised that "the everlasting chasm between the Education and Evaluation institutes affected the alignment between the monitoring and evaluation of schools." She explained that the Education institute inspectors requested many things during the year that the evaluation teams did not know about.

The Education Institute inspectors from the Curriculum Standards Office were responsible for providing the schools with all the necessary support and training programs, to ensure effective and smooth implementation of curriculum standards in Independent schools (Al- Meghrabi, 2007). Also, consultants from the Independent Schools Office visited schools to monitor school leaders' performance and other administrative staff, such as social workers. Because of their frequent visits during the school year, teachers and school leaders reported that they were accountable to adhere to their requirements. Similarly, the Ministry officials confirmed that the SEC inspections were considered one of the primary accountability tools.

According to the Independent Schools Organisational Structure document, Independent schools were responsible to fulfil the Education Institute's requirements (Supreme Education Council, 2014). Moreover, the Independent Schools Staff Personnel Policy document indicated that school operators were expected to get approvals from the Education Institute and follow its regulations regarding recruitment, professional development, and staff appraisal (Supreme Education Council, 2006a). Both documents did not clarify how school leaders would be held accountable for their students' performance; it primarily required reports and evidence for adherence to administrative procedures. Moreover, the documents did not clarify the procedures the SEC would implement to ensure their adherence to the expectations.

Teachers also felt accountable towards the SEC inspectors by providing them with their teaching plans and discussing with them their students' performance. When asked about their role, (T1) explained:

> "I can consider them as accountability because they are looking at the picture from the corners. Like if there is one part that we missed or we didn't give it like that much work. They are telling us work more on this one."

vi. The Teachers and School Leaders Licensure

The Evaluation Institute published the Teachers and School Leaders Licensing policy in 2011, which was introduced to both Independent and private schools in 2008 (Supreme Education Council, 2011). According to Ellili-Cherif, Romanowski and Nasser (2012), the policy was introduced to support the SEC in monitoring and assessing educators working in Qatar's schools against the NPSTSL standards. It was believed that the policy was to bring all teachers to a comparable level across all schools in Qatar, meaning once teachers were licensed their professional practice would be equalised and could move around (Ellili-Cherif, Romanowski and Nasser, 2012).

The policy document highlighted the procedures for fulfilling the professional standards and acquiring the license. The document gave a step-by-step explanation of the licensing process and it included some procedures to promote internal evaluations and quality controls at the school level. The document was detailed and was more procedural than directional (Supreme Education Council, 2011). According to a former Evaluation Institute official, the policy facilitated the monitoring of both teachers and school leaders and emphasised accountability (Supreme Education Council, n.a).

However, as noticed in other policy documents, there was ambiguity regarding how schools would be accountable for the performance of teachers and school leaders. All the teachers and school leaders reported that the licensure policy was not effective, and its implementation was inconsistent. For example, the policy did not have consequences for not acquiring the licensure, and schools did not know who was supposed to get licensed. Many participants explained that their questions about the policy were unanswered or were provided with conflicting information regarding the processes and licensing procedures. It provoked feelings of uncertainty and lack of trust in the policy and its potential results among many educators. (SL1) explained that "the licensing policy was good but it was not fully utilised. The implementation of the policy fluctuated." Similarly, another school leader (SL2)

explained that the policy was ineffective because "it depended on how much thick the teacher's file would get, it depended on more evidence than the teacher efficiency and teaching and delivery." Similarly, (SL3) explained:

> "It (the teacher license) was a tool for self-development, and the negative side was their reliance on paper evidence and not actual performance. It was a burden on the school staff and the Licensing Office staff…It was not effective."

The above was supported by Ellili-Cherif, Romanowski and Nasser (2012), who reported that: (1) policymakers did not have a vision and adequate understanding of the licensure process, (2) there were constant changes in the policy procedures and instructions, (3) the policy did not have a clear implementation plan, and (4) the licensing teams did not have the needed capacity to implement the policy (Ellili-Cherif, Romanowski and Nasser, 2012).

vii. School Report Cards

School report cards (SRC) were first issued in 2005 and were designed to promote parents' choice and enable them to hold schools to account. Using the SRC, the SEC aimed to provide Independent schools with an analysis of their progress over the years and compare their performance with other schools. The report cards were issued to every school and included the results of the Comprehensive Educational School Surveys (Supreme Education Council, 2004). The reports included statistical data of the student and teacher population, their performance, academic achievement, and their views about the school. The report cards aimed to inform officials and parents about the actual performance of each school. Surprisingly, none of the participants mentioned the reports as a tool that promoted accountability.

According to RAND, the report cards offer schools the needed information to help them improve and focus on what mattered. RAND also encouraged that the report cards include indices that cover students' performance and other priority targets for transparent communication about each school's level (Zellman et al., 2009). Three of the MEHE officials stressed in their interviews that all stakeholders would appreciate the publication of transparent, credible, and accurate performance data. One official (MEHE2) explained:

> "Accountability is about the institutions' commitment to provide correct and accurate information about their practices, achievements, and output results to raise the institution's efficiency."

One of the early thinkers behind the reform philosophy (MEHE4) explained that implementing the reform principles empowered parents to hold schools to account, which would not be able without access to information and performance reports.

Analysis of the data revealed that RAND suggested the SRC to encourage parental involvement in their children's education and promote accountability in the system. However, it was evident that the report cards were implemented with little utilisation of the valuable information they contained. For instance, none of the teachers and school leaders agreed that the SRC were of any use in holding them to account. Similarly, an early study of accountability by Guarino and Tanner (2012) confirmed that schools did not use them, and parents were not affected by them in choosing a school for their children.

Many countries acknowledge the importance of providing stakeholders with timely, accessible, and comprehensive educational performance data using report cards to increase transparency and accountability (Cameron, Moses and Gillies, 2006). It has been argued that when parents do not have enough information about school performance, they tend to make false judgements and assumptions; and generally struggle to hold schools accountable (Winkler and Herstein, 2005). However, prior research suggests that policymakers need to be patient because report cards take time to achieve the intended impact (Scott, 2007).

viii. International Assessments

Qatar's first participation in the PISA assessments was in 2006. The purpose was to begin reviewing and benchmarking its performance compared to other countries (Brewer et al., 2007). Since then, Qatar has been participating in three International assessments TIMMS, PIRLS, and PISA to have comparable data to improve its educational policies and outcomes (Supreme Education Council, 2012). It has been argued that the release of the results of the international assessments encourages policymakers to examine their practices and benchmark their performance in comparison to other countries (Ercikan, Roth and Asil, 2015). Countries often utilise their results to validate their efforts, identify the appropriate policy initiatives, set measurable targets and strategic objectives to reform their education (Tan, 2019).

According to the Evaluation Institute's (2004) annual progress report, the institute was responsible for facilitating the implementation of the international assessments in Independent and private schools. The document indicated that the purpose of participation in the examinations was to benchmark the country's performance with other countries to improve curriculum content and teaching practices (Supreme Education Council, 2004).

None of the participants interviewed believed that international assessments contributed to accountability. However, Qatar can learn a lot about its students by disaggregated analysis of its results and developing a clearer view of its students' population and their perceptions of learning. It has been argued that countries can use international assessments to investigate which policies and practices that promote excellent performance (Ercikan, Roth and Asil, 2015; Tan, 2019).

ix. Independent Schools' Boards of Trustees

The SEC required each Independent school to form a Board of Trustees that would increase parental and community involvement in the students' learning. According to a former Education Institute official, the BoTs encouraged parents to participate in school decisions and promoted accountability and transparency. It was believed that the board members would encourage good practices at the school level such as self-evaluations and internal audits to create another level for accountability in the system (Al- Raya, 2011). However, their effectiveness fluctuated from one school to the other; and some board members complained that their contributions were not acknowledged by officials in the SEC (Al-Ibrahim, 2017). It has been argued that board members that share a strategic vision and work collaboratively with the school leadership can contribute to the school's improvement (Baker, Campbell and Ostroff, 2016).

When asked about their roles, two school leaders explained that their board members reviewed their performance, sponsored some of their school activities, and helped them in their annual planning efforts. However, they felt they had a minimal role in holding them accountable for their performance. (SL3) explained:

> "The Board of Trustees when it was formed during the time of the Supreme Education Council was effective…Their role was to question the school, but they did not hold the school accountable…Their role was supportive in the financial

and moral aspect and development programs…It was not accountability but rather support."

Other participants, primarily teachers, did not feel that the BoTs had any impact on their day-to-day practices. Although the SEC official press releases indicated that the BoTs enhan ced accountability in Independent schools, all the participants disagreed.

According to the Organisational Framework for BoTs in Independent Schools document, the boards were expected to "contribute in the accountability process on behalf of parents and the community" (Supreme Education Council, 2009b, p.3). However, the document did not clarify what and how. Although, some of the early reports about the reform confirmed that parents were key players in holding schools accountable through choice and feedback (Guarino and Tanner, 2012: Brewer et. al., 2007). Yet, in reality, choice was not fully implemented due to capacity issues, and boards were not fully utilised to hold schools to account. In the first two years of the ENE reform, accountability depended heavily on regulations rather than choice; and focused primarily on financial restrictions. The ineffective implementation of those ambitious principles was due to the system's capacity constraints that grew with time (Guarino and Tanner, 2012; Jaafar, 2011).

5.3.2 Other Accountability Enhancing Tools

Adding to the above tools, other tools were either intended or unintended, yet they could be further utilised to enhance accountability in the system. Analysis of the responses provided by the research participants and evidence from the documents signalled the need to bring them to light.

i. The Professional Standards for Teachers and School Leaders

The implementation of the professional standards for teachers and school leaders (NPSTSL) provided a framework for what is expected from teachers and school leaders working in Independent schools (Romanowski and Amatullah, 2014). In some of the policy documents analysed, it was evident that the standards informed some of the accountability mechanisms and created a level of coherence among them. There was a reference to the standards in the School Evaluation policy, the Licensing policy and the Organisational Structure document. Additionally, the SEC inspectors used the professional standards as a

benchmark for good practice in some of their forms and teachers reflected on them in their daily lesson planning. It has been argued that standards provide a framework that guides performance and enables the evaluation of individual performance (OECD, 2013; Hargreaves and Shirely, 2009). According to Romanowski and Amatullah (2014), the standards provided the blueprint to what educators are accountable for inside the classroom as they represent the non-negotiable level of standard practices, especially when they are centred on outcomes. Generally, professional standards provided a clear framework for good performance and enabled easy evaluation given they were well written (OECD, 2013).

According to the analysis undertaken by the OECD of the use of standards across numerous systems, the report indicated that "standards-based policies are characterised by their emphasis on ensuring the accountability of those in charge" (OECD, 2013, p.6). Moreover, standards give educators clear directions about the targeted instructional practices and how student learning can be supported (Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit and Pittenger, 2014). However, for the professional standards to be effective, educators should translate them into their daily practice and instructional activities (Hargreaves and Shirely, 2009).

Although the participants interviewed did not highlight the standards as an accountability tool, some of the core tools used them for benchmark. Hence, the professional standards can be further utilised to hold schools to account. One school leader explained (SL2) that the standards "made the people start to think of themselves as professionals and where they stand in terms of achieving these national professional standards." She strongly called for more utilisation of the standards to inform professional behaviour in all schools.

Given that the ENE reform adopted a standards-based accountability model, the NPSTSL could have been utilised as a core tool for managing the performance of both teachers and school leaders. A study conducted by Romanowski and Amatullah (2014) confirmed that some Independent school teachers used the professional standards to set performance goals and acted as a tool to benchmark their teaching practices; however, many felt they were too many, ambiguous, and very ambitious to reflect them in their daily routine.

ii. The Organisational Structure of Independent schools

Due to their independent status, a modified structure was developed and implemented in all the Independent schools to ensure distribution of authority and responsibility. School operators were required to follow the staffing procedures required by the SEC's Education

Institute (Supreme Education Council, 2014). The Independent Schools Organisational Structure circular sent to schools highlighted the primary guidelines for monitoring performance at the school level that included implementing the (NPSTSL) for managing staff performance, adhering to the Staff Personal policy, meeting the expectations highlighted in the School Operators contracts, and following the Education Institute's guidelines regarding roles and responsibilities, teaching hours, and staff recruitment (Supreme Education Council, 2014).

Independent schools adopted a hierarchal structure through which more authority and responsibilities were expected from both teaching and administrative staff as they move up the structure. For example, subject coordinators or department heads monitor teachers and assistant teachers, subject coordinators report to the vice principals, who finally report directly to the school principal or operator. The Staff Personnel Policy issued in 2006 identified what was expected of school operators in managing their staff (Supreme Education Council, 2006a). The SEC inspectors and supervisors monitor school principals and vice-principals through periodic school visits. Performance reporting is considered a form of accountability (Mashaw, 2006; Levin, 1974); hence, making the new structures somewhat ready to enhance accountability at the school level. All the teachers and school leaders interviewed reported that performance monitoring at their schools was more consistent and effective compared to the SEC's changing policies and procedures. Moreover, teachers and subject coordinators felt more accountable towards their principals than the SEC. For example, teachers felt that the nature of the personal connection with their subject coordinators and vice-principals enhanced their performance. The above was supported by (MEHE4), who explained that the philosophy behind adopting accountability as a reform principle was to balance between the other two principles: choice and autonomy. She emphasised that the aim was to nurture a culture of internal accountability at the school level by normalising monitoring and self-reviews as a constant practice in all schools.

The way Independent schools were structured facilitated the implementation of internal monitoring and self-reviews. Thus, it would have been more helpful if schools were supported in utilising some of the accountability tools instead of being closely inspected at the beginning of the reform. One school teacher explained (T2):

> "The school is putting lots of things to make us accountable. Even the job description; they put it for every one of us to help us do our best to be accountable

> for it. And they are putting for each one of us roles so that the coordinator could have her own roles and the teachers have their own roles. And everyone knows what they need from us. They have a yearly plan which has objectives and you know exactly what you are going to do. It makes you better."

iii. Qatar National Education Data System (QNEDS)

The Qatari National Educational Data System (QNEDS) was launched in 2007 to provide electronic performance reports and dashboards to help schools, parents and decision-makers follow and monitor schools and their students (Qatar University, 2014). The QNEDS was designed for better monitoring and evaluation of the schools' performance. With better data collection procedures and more investment in technological structures, the QNEDS can "turn data into actionable information" (Zellman et al., 2011, p.140). Also, the data system was a tool that would provide longitudinal data about the performance of schools and their students to all stakeholders and contribute to the decision-making process (Al-Arab, 2012). The QNEDS contained more than 80 reports that provide statistical analyses about the performance of students, teachers, and school leaders. The QNEDS aimed to develop data collection and management practices in the system to support the monitoring of the performance (Supreme Education Council, 2009c).

According to Rothman (2015), the schools of Georgia were able to meet the state targets and outperform other states in achievement using colour-coded scorecards that were publically displayed to all schools. The dashboards highlighted where each school met the target and performance gaps and made it easier for officials to hold schools accountable (Rothman, 2015). Electronic data management systems can support education systems in: (1) benchmarking academic performance, (2) monitoring the achievement of targets, (3) reporting progress against goals, and (4) holding schools to account (Abdul-Hamid, 2014). In addition, it can support governments in better governing decentralised educational institutions (Winkler, 2005).

The teachers and school leaders interviewed did not feel the QNEDS played a role in enhancing accountability in the system. Despite the investments made in designing the system, the QNEDS was not effectively utilised. Teachers and school leaders did not consider it a primary source for valuable performance data, and parents did not have access to it yet.

It has been argued that good accountability systems combine institutional evaluations and objective external audits (OECD, 2013). The review of the accountability mechanisms revealed that the reform had promoted positive internal and external practices that stemmed from the implementation of the above tools. However, they needed to be implemented with more cohesion, stability, and alignment for better impact. When asked about other tools that schools can implement for better accountability, all the participants agreed that the current tools were enough. There was a consensus among educators working in the schools and officials regarding the importance of maximising the benefits of the current tools. Especially school leaders who expressed their worry about adding other tools as it would burden schools and add more to their plate. Besides, some school leaders complained that they would spend many hours working on reports and collecting data and their efforts were usually ignored or not utilised as described by one school leader (SL2) who expressed her opinion about the current tools "they have no impact, mainly they are enough… but where is the impact. We never saw something." She strongly believed that the current tools addressed all needed aspects to hold schools to account, but they did not benefit schools nor the MEHE.

Officials working in the SEC shifted the focus from one of the core accountability tools by focusing on other secondary reporting mechanisms that triggered a lot of controversy and frustration among educators. However, the data analysis revealed that the system has the potential and the right elements for an effective accountability system.

5.4 Gaps in the Implementation of the Accountability Mechanisms

The data analysis from related policy documents and primarily interviews revealed some gaps that align with other important literature findings of accountability in Qatar and other countries. The commonality of gaps faced by many education systems confirms the ambiguity regarding how to implement a principle like accountability. The failure of a wealthy country like Qatar in effectively implementing this concept calls for a re-evaluation of the suggested implementation models of this principle (Guarino and Tanner, 2012, p. 225). Furthermore, there were some issues in balancing autonomy with accountability in Independent schools, fully understanding the concept, the capacity to implement the mechanisms effectively, and clarifying expectations.

Thus, the thesis brings more light to how the gaps hindered the successful implementation of accountability mechanisms and informed the recommendations for improvement in the sixth chapter. The gaps identified include the need for more autonomy to hold schools accountable, low human capacity, and lack of clarity.

i. Schools need autonomy to be accountable

Literature confirms the need for autonomy to successfully implement accountability in schools, especially when decentralisation is a component governing the system (UNESCO, 2017; Aoki, 2010) The concept of accountability is tied to its counterpart, autonomy (Wallenius et al., 2018). It means that officials cannot effectively hold schools or individuals accountable for the rigid policies and procedures that they enforce. It has been argued that when schools have the freedom to make their own choices in terms of the curriculum, teaching, and learning activities, the more accountable they were for their performance (UNESCO, 2017). This was supported by a former official (MEHE3) who explained: "every person is given a space for work and at the end of a certain period of time the work is evaluated." He strongly believed that rigid policies increased frustration among educators who blamed the government for their low performance.

RAND indicated that the SEC "must be willing to relinquish some authority" and monitor schools through outcomes and performance measures (Brewer et al., 2007, p.45). However, one of the ENE reform's repeated criticisms was the rapid return to the centralised and bureaucratic practices; schools in Qatar needed more autonomy to address their issues. Some studies about the Qatari reform indicated that the SEC's excessive control hindered a lot of creative initiatives in Independent schools (Al-Ethawi and Al-Kuwari, 2018; Guarino and Tanner, 2012). It was no surprise to learn from the interviews that all the school leaders enjoyed more autonomy at the beginning of the ENE reform; therefore, they were able to implement many innovative initiatives in their schools. A school leader (SL2) emphasised that schools need more freedom. She explained:

> "Move a little bit to decentralisation. Maybe because you need to give the people some kind of freedom to hold them responsible, to hold them accountable. I need to get some freedom of decision."

It has been argued that granting schools more autonomy to make their decisions generates trust, professional growth, and a sense of responsibility. People are more likely to

deliver if held accountable for their decisions (UNESCO, 2017). This idea was supported by school leaders in the interviews who believed that accountability was meaningful at the beginning of the reform when the system was decentralised and schools had the freedom to make decisions and perform some tasks. They felt that accountability is meaningless with the return of the centralised control of the Ministry. Some school principals also felt that the inspectors practiced excessive control with their highly demanding expectation that eventually left schools with little room for autonomy; and affirmed that accountability does not mean rigid control. For instance, a school leader said (SL1) "we need a system which has some kind of centralised structure, but sometimes gives a room for creativity."

Surprisingly, four of the MEHE officials acknowledged that schools needed some space to claim responsibility for their conduct. One official (MEHE2) explained: "we hope there is a balance between centralisation and decentralisation in the next stage." She believed that schools needed more freedom regarding some tasks related to teaching and managing staff to promote competitiveness among schools. However, both the MEHE officials and teachers seemed to agree regarding the Ministry's need for meaningful control over schools to achieve order.

Additionally, there was a weakness in Qatar's choice mechanism and the reform was only a matter of converting government schools to independent status rather than developing new attractive model schools. Independent schools were crowded due to insufficient infrastructure that stole the competitive advantage of giving parents choice (Guarino and Tanner, 2012).

Qatar is not alone in facing this issue; for example, several attempts to decentralise education in the United States failed due to issues in balancing autonomy and accountability when governing schools (Aoki, 2010). In Texas, school principals complained that introducing accountability in the system emphasised evaluation for control that made schools "a standardised testing machine" (Heilig and Darling-Hammond, 2008, p. 97). Thus, it is important to balance centralised and decentralised schools' governance for the effective implementation of accountability in Education (Al-Ethawi and Al-Kuwari, 2018).

ii. Weak human capacity affects accountability

The capacity of the human resources and governing structures influenced how schools responded to the mechanisms put in place to hold them to account. It is believed that "no

accountability approach can succeed if actors lack an enabling environment or are ill-equipped to meet their responsibilities" (UNESCO, 2017, p.1). Autonomy and decentralisation promoted SEC officials' and school leaders' capacity in important tasks such as planning, monitoring, self-reviews, and institutional evaluations. However, it was evident from the data analysis that the low capacity to administer the newly decentralised system at both the government and school level hindered the successful implementation of the reform plans.

In the interviews, the school leaders indicated that some of the accountability mechanisms were of good quality; however, the capacity of people implementing them caused many issues. In addition, there was inconsistency in implementing some of the accountability tools due to varying levels of expertise and inadequate preparation of inspectors working in the SEC. For example, the school evaluation policy was equivalent in quality to policies seen in high-performing education systems, yet the evaluation teams implementing the policy were not well trained. Moreover, the school leaders indicated that inspectors working in the SEC did not positively influence schools due to their lack of training and misunderstanding of some of the reform principles. One school leader explained that the school evaluation teams were so controlling and very judgmental. They criticised school practices and wrote very harsh reports that demotivated schools to improve. Another school leader (SL3) explained:

> "Before you hold me accountable, the Ministry is supposed to inform me, provide me with support and provide me with guidance; and then hold me accountable ... Because before I hold the employees accountable, I must inform them and train them."

A similar finding was confirmed by MEHE officials who acknowledged that limitations in their capabilities and under-preparedness affected the smooth implementation of many of the ENE initiatives. One official working in student assessment (MEHE7) emphasised that the companies contracted did not build their capacity, and there were many things they needed to learn to do their job:

"What we need is training and a little bit of analysis…They (consulting companies) do it for you and they make you rely on them. So once they leave, everything collapses."

She thought the work done with the companies was of good quality, but relying on them to do the work without building local capacity was a big mistake.

iii. Unclear expectations and responsibilities.

It has been argued that Qatar's ENE reform needed well-defined performance indicators and clear expectations to assess its effectiveness (Al-Ammri, 2012; Guarino and Tanner, 2012). In the interviews, both teachers and school leaders revealed that there were many mechanisms put in place. However, they needed to be clarified and explained to all schools. One school leader (SL1) clarified that "clarity of the main goals for everyone and this starts from the top of the pyramid." It was evident from many of the policy documents that they were very procedural, too detailed, and contained many ambiguous terms that needed clarifications. All the participants agreed that many of the SEC policies were neither explained nor appropriately communicated. One school leader (SL3) explained:

> "Policies come! We call the Ministry, we want someone to explain them for us. We do not receive any help. In the end, we read and try to understand by ourselves. Sometimes you feel that this is something that they bring from outside and modify it and then apply it in the school. Even the inspectors when schools encountered problems, the inspector had no role."

Interestingly, it was the viciousness of the reform principles that made it difficult to balance their expectations. For instance, the data analysis revealed that balancing variety with accountability encountered some challenges as some of the policy documents were very procedural and lacked flexibility. Moreover, all the school leaders confirmed the rigidity of the SEC control which contradicted the principle of variety. Schools needed general frameworks to guide their plans and more freedom for creativity.

Moreover, the data revealed that the SEC officials sent misleading messages to the community. In an interview with a former SEC official talking about variety to promote parental choice in Independent schools, she explained "it is up to the parent themselves to decide in which school they wish to enrol their child" (Supreme Education Council, 2007a, p.11) However, Guarino and Tanner's study revealed that parents struggled with choosing schools due to insufficient infrastructure (Guarino and Tanner, 2012).

Although in many press releases and official statements SEC officials continued to promote autonomy and variety, yet many schools struggled to balance between adhering to the harsh demands of SEC and enjoying their independent status as emphasised in the interviews.

iv. *Low utilisation of core accountability tools*

The data from the policy documents and interviews indicated that the ENE reform had a positive impact, primarily in adopting good evaluation and reporting practices that enhance accountability. The SEC implemented new approaches to objectively collect, analyse, and disseminate information to support both policymakers and parents (Supreme Education Council, 2007a). However, all the participants agreed that the information generated from the implemented tools was not fully utilised to hold schools accountable. According to one of the educational experts (SME1), "the ultimate aim (of accountability) isn't only to reward people, but it should focus on improvement." She explained that institutional procedures need to follow data analysis and dissemination and that they need to be acted upon.

Similarly, the school principals interviewed explained that the SEC held some annual symposiums to announce the schools' performance in the QCEA assessments. In the annual meetings, the SEC announced the highest performing students and the schools they belonged to in an effort to increase competition among Independent schools. Yet, announcing high-performing schools at the end of the year was not enough to promote performance and encourage good competition between schools. For instance, schools had no incentives according to their academic performance. Moreover, many Independent school teachers and principals felt that the results of the national assessments were not used effectively to improve performance. There were no consequences for low performance, which made schools demotivated to enhance their efforts further. A school leader (SL1) affirmed that:

> "The most important question to ask is whether the accountability tools have a role in raising student success…this question must be asked. And this question we usually leave at the end."

Surprisingly, MEHE officials also agreed that some of the core accountability tools were not fully utilised. They confirmed that due to capacity challenges and ambiguity some of the tools were not effective. (MEHE1) explained:

> "It is necessary to distinguish between administrative accountability and educational accountability. It can also be emphasised that most of the efforts exerted by institutions are directed towards administrative accountability…And a little effort focused on educational accountability which is measured by the educator’s achievement of his educational outcomes."

She strongly felt that it was necessary to develop the Ministry's capacity in data analysis and utilisation by working with educational experts from high-performing institutions.

Similarly, when it came to school evaluations, only school leaders were directly influenced. Teachers had little information regarding those evaluations or how they were conducted. Some teachers explained that they received the final reports and that the results rarely informed their instructional practices because they came at the end of the year. This dilemma indicates the difficulty in influencing teachers' day-to-day teaching practices through accountability mechanisms (UNESCO, 2017).

v. Incompetent school leaders hinder accountability efforts

As a result of the ENE reform, school principals began performing new tasks that they were not accustomed to, such as annual self-reviews and action plans to improve their performance. The school principals expressed how those tools guided their school improvement efforts. In the interviews, all the school leaders and teachers agreed that effective implementation of the accountability tools was directly influenced by what the school principal emphasised. For example, two teachers explained that commitment and quality in a school differed according to what the principal in the school focused on. One school leader confirmed that it was the responsibility of the school principal to utilise the accountability mechanisms for improving school performance.

Similarly, MEHE officials emphasised that school principals were the core influencers in making accountability work at the school level. A former official (MEHE3) explained:

> "All levels must be subject to degrees of accountability appropriate to the nature of the tasks related to each level. But the most important level lies in schools, and this means the teacher and school administration."

It is crucial for the success of all students to have competent school leaders who encourage all towards fulfilling their roles in enhancing students' learning. Similarly, many of the educational experts interviewed explained that careful consideration of the qualifications and soft skills of the school leaders is necessary. They believed that school leaders need to demonstrate ethical behaviours at all times. They need to act as role models in their institutions and promote good performance.

It has been argued that ministries of education might seem to be more accountable than any other stakeholder to provide quality education to all students. However, principals and teachers are the ones responsible for making government policies and initiatives work. There is increasing evidence that the commitment of all in implementing accountability mechanisms is highly influenced by the school's leadership (UNESCO, 2017). However, in the interviews, all the school leaders expressed that had they received the needed training and support from the SEC at the beginning of the reform, the reform outcomes would have been positive.

Literature suggests that the success of accountability mechanisms is highly dependent on the capability of school principals to encourage change and improve practices at the school level (Paletta, Basyte Ferrari and Alimehmeti, 2020). However, one of the identified gaps in the accountability mechanisms was that principals were not held accountable for their students' performance and decisions using formal evaluations. It led to many authority abuse cases and manipulations (Al- Ammri, 2012, Al-Kubaisi, 2011). School principals in Independent schools needed to be annually evaluated using comprehensive evaluation mechanisms to inform their performance (Al-Ammri, 2012).

For example, the implementation of high-stakes assessments in the United States provoked unexpected behaviours from schools that include gaming due to low school capacity to manage school change (Darling-Hammond and Sykes, 2003). Similarly, in Indonesia and the Philippines, the government experienced a gap between the needed and actual capacity in areas like planning and financial management among school leaders that had severe consequences for governments' decentralisation efforts in education (Green, 2005).

According to Paletta, Basyte Ferrari and Alimehmeti (2020), when school principals encourage instructional leadership behaviours that include performance monitoring and self-evaluations among teachers, they achieve tangible impact at the system level. Provoking a changing culture at the grassroots "prevents the risk of the accountability system turning into an expensive bureaucratic machine that produces information only for the ministerial centre" (Paletta, Basyte Ferrari and Alimehmeti, 2020, p.157).

5.5 Conclusion

Accountability as a concept is rarely comprehensively explored in education literature (UNESCO, 2017; Smith, 2017). Hence, Qatar's radical reform enabled the investigation of its

applications from several angles. Moreover, Qatar's experience provided valuable lessons for other systems as they experience similar reforms and aim to implement similar approaches and principles. It was not a surprise to learn that implementing standards-based accountability in a short period was too ambitious and not realistic at all for Qatar (Nasser, 2017; Guarino and Tanner, 2012; Gonzalez et al., 2009). The deep analysis of the research data and wide literature review led to arriving at a set of insightful and interesting findings that Qatar and other countries could take away.

The research emphasises the findings of other research on accountability, however, it ties the different elements discussed in the literature by investigating it from a comprehensive system level. The findings stresses two key dimensions of accountability: the human and institutional dimensions. The human dimension findings highlight that stakeholder capacity, their involvement, and buy-in are extremely important for enhancing accountability in the system. On the other hand, the institutional findings affirm that governing structures and operational procedures can either make or break accountability in educational systems. Thus, the thesis findings and recommendations focus on what is learned from Qatar's experience and what needs to be done in both dimensions.

6. Chapter Six: Discussion of Results and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The data analysis and a survey of a wide range of literature resulted in a set of themes that further affirm critical aspects of educational accountability and revealed deeper insights. Qatar's ENE reform made a paradigm shift that drastically changed how schools operated; primarily by implementing accountability as a core principle for the reform. While the SEC struggled to implement the other reform principles (Al-Ethawi and Al-Kuwari, 2018; Nasser, 2017; Guarino and Tanner, 2012; Gonzalez et al., 2009; Zellman et al., 2009), accountability was the only reform principle that had the most significant impact on school governance in Qatar, especially with the return of the Ministry's centralised control. Therefore, the research findings remain relevant to Qatar's current context and the global discussion of accountability. Moreover, the research recommendations provide a future policy direction for further improvements of the current accountability system in Qatar.

6.2 Discussion of Findings

As discussed in the previous chapter, the data analysis revealed two main dimensions that the research findings fall under: the institutional dimension and the human dimension. The survey of both past and recent literature confirms that both dimensions are critical for better application of accountability in education. Bae (2018, p.19) pointed that for successful implementation of a multi-dimensional accountability system with multiple measures, governments should consider four conditions: "capacity, stakeholder engagement, organisational structures, and flexibility and local control." Bae's conditions align with the two dimensions concluded from the analysis of the research data. Similarly, Darling-Hammond and Sykes (2003) argued that education systems fail to meet expectations due to three primary reasons: (1) the absence of trust between schools and the Ministry, (2) rigidity in governing schools, and (3) the lack of qualified school principals.

More comprehensive reports that compared the experience of many countries in school autonomy, accountability, and choice published by UNESCO and the World Bank reached similar conclusions. UNSECO's (2017, p.2) GEM report indicated that governments need to enable actors with resources, professional development, incentives, and capacity building to fulfill the requirements of complicated accountability mechanisms. Also, officials must develop

rigorous policies and procedures to hold educators accountable using evaluations and audits (UNSECO, 2017). Similarly, in their review of the impact of 168 initiatives related to school autonomy and accountability (SAA) in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, the World Bank revealed that SAA reforms faced many obstacles related to limited stakeholder consensus and participation, low local capacity, complicated accountability tools, and other institutional challenges related to school funding and poor planning (Takeda, Demas, and Shibuya, 2014).

Qatar did not stray away from how other countries experienced accountability reforms; as a matter of fact, the Qatari experience provided an in-depth view of it as a governing principle, its applications, and its limitations. The analysis of the data from documents and interviews revealed four key findings: (1) the implementation of the core mechanisms was inconsistent and lacked coherence; (2) many of the accountability tools were not clear and their objectives were not well communicated to schools, (3) schools were held accountable using other unintended mechanisms, and (4) the system's low capacity affected the effective implementation of the accountability mechanisms. The findings emphasised the country's repeated failure to adopt a shared and comprehensive strategy to reform its schooling system by addressing the root causes of educational problems. The absence of a clear national direction and the low local capacity in areas such as strategic planning and governance have plagued many of the country's former initiatives (Al-Kubaisi, 2011). The ENE reform, like previous reforms, addressed educational issues in a fragmented and hasty manner. The ad hoc initiation of national-level projects with minimal planning and contextualisation led to the inefficient implementation and minimal impact on outcomes.

Although officials adopted transparency and accountability as core principles for governing schools, they were not ready to be transparent nor accountable to the community yet. Both principles remain new to the country's conservative culture and need some time to evolve in public institutions. Reputation is highly valued in the Qatari culture and people work hard to avoid getting exposed or publicly sanctioned for misconduct. The preserved and connected nature of the Qatari culture prevented officials from sanctioning their colleagues as it would be culturally disrespectful. For instance, many of the educational experts emphasised that some of the former SEC officials were not held accountable for their bad decisions and mistakes. They also indicated that some major structural and policy changes were introduced by the SEC without providing a transparent explanation.

The research participants believed that accountability must be institutionalised at all levels starting from leaders at the top of the pyramid down to the school level. It requires making tough decisions and engaging in hard conversations publicly with stakeholders which is uncommon in Qatar. Although the country has made progress in openly discussing educational problems and asking for public justifications from officials, those concepts were novel during the ENE reform time.

Moreover, the findings showed there were two types of accountability, accountability that is written in official documents, and perceived accountability. Although there was an agreement regarding the definition of accountability and its purpose, the participants did not agree on a set of accountability mechanisms. Romanowski (2014, p.9) argues that the conflict between policy and implementation is a common issue in complex social contexts like education for "educational goals and ends are seldom clear and definitive." To sum up, the results of the research are summarised in three concluding themes that will be discussed in light of the institutional and human dimensions: under-preparedness, ambiguity, and inconsistency.

6.2.1 Underpreparedness and Rapid implementation

One of the repeated criticisms of the ENE reform was the high expectations of the reform designers and the rapid implementation. It was thought that one of the reform's main downfalls was how rapidly the four principles were expected to be fully adopted and implemented (Nasser, 2017; Guarino and Tanner, 2012; Gonzalez et al., 2009; Zellman et al., 2009). In the interviews, a former MEHE official (MEHE3) explained that the SEC did not have clear plans and expectations about implementing accountability, and some of the accountability tools were developed on the spot. He explained in a large-scale reform like the ENE reform, "the ad hoc system doesn't work"; and implementing accountability needed more time and enough orientation.

Given that schools were to operate independently, it was believed that the four principles reasonably aligned with the reform model. However, a survey of literature revealed the complexity of operationalising big concepts such as autonomy, choice, and accountability (Wallenius et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2017; Takeda, Demas, and Shibuya, 2014; World Bank, 2003). In a press release, the former Student Assessment Office Director confirmed that patience was needed for the reform principles to unfold, he stated: "the reform needs more time

to stand on its own…we have no choice but to be patient" (Supreme Education Council, 2007a, p.13). However, it was evident from the interviews that schools needed realistic expectations and continuous support to fulfill the reform's ambitious aims gradually.

According to Figlio and Loeb (2011), when systems set unattainable expectations, it promotes hesitance and reluctance among educators working in schools. They argue that, when expectations are very high, schools usually would be demotivated to make an effort to meet them knowing that the government would not sanction most schools. Their behaviour is due to their belief that the government would not close schools or fire teachers on a large scale. Therefore, education systems need to set goals that are reasonable and realistic at every level in the system and celebrate small successed to encourage improvement efforts. One of the experts (SME1) confirmed that: "we have to be also realistic with what we are trying to achieve and how we are going to achieve it. We don't put goals which are beyond achievement." The high expectations of policymakers and the absence of clear plans and targets demotivated schools and did not result in the expected improvements in performance.

It has been argued that small-scale and targeted accountability interventions can address institutional challenges and improve processes gradually. Small successes create momentum and raise the stakeholders' trust and confidence (Gershberg, González, and Meade, 2012). Therefore, commitment to medium and long-term plans is a key ingredient for enhancing an accountability culture in education systems like Qatar.

Moreover, the drastic shift from centralised control to decentralisation came with a price; school leaders were at the forefront and were required to fulfill many new roles due to the newly introduced autonomy. Educators working in schools needed more guidance and support in the first few years of the reform. They also needed to be oriented as principals with different expectations in advance. The off the cuff implementation of accountability mechanisms with insufficient preparation and orientation caused the dissatisfaction and frustration of many educators working in both the SEC and schools.

A former official (MEHE4) explained that it was difficult to balance between the high expectations of the reform and the capacity constraints; thus, the wisest decision was to maneuver or dilute some of the proposed accountability systems to fit the context. She explained it was the only choice at the beginning. However, analysis of the policy documents revealed the opposite; many of the accountability tools were too ambitious, too procedural, and had high expectations. Thus, it was not a wise idea to implement accountability

mechanisms at a system level without piloting some of the tools before applying them at a large scale. Schools needed to be involved in the policy development process and engaged in the design of some of the accountability tools.

Moreover, officials working at the MEHE confirmed in the interviews that they needed more preparation before applying borrowed policies that have little relevance to the context. They emphasised that many of the accountability initiatives were led by western agencies and needed to be contextualised before implementation in schools.

6.2.2 Ambiguity

There was an apparent misalignment between officials working within the SEC, between the SEC and schools, and between the SEC and parents that resulted from the lack of communication and transparent discussion of the reform plans. Moreover, attempting to promote variety in Independent schools while holding them rigidly accountable using strict procedures needed a lot of consideration. That was previously confirmed by different researchers in Qatar, who argued that there was a consensus among stakeholders regarding the ambiguity of the reform's four principles and how to implement each one effectively (Al-Ammri, 2012; Al- Kubaisi, 2011). The ambiguity triggered raging reactions from stakeholders such as teachers and parents. In the absence of a strategic vision and implementation plans, the SEC either yielded to their demands or ignored them completely. Both routes had several consequences that disturbed serious efforts to promote accountability in education. Moreover, the analysis revealed contradictions between the policies and how it was translated in the field. Schools received mixed messages and were confused in addressing the demands of the SEC.

The data from the interviews and the documents revealed that, despite having an array of tools, schools were being held to account according to the tool sought by the SEC at the time. In addition, the implemented accountability tools were fragmented, contained ambiguous terms, and lacked coherence. Besides, the documents did not communicate a unified message, and officials sent sometimes contradicting messages which made matters worse for schools. For example, in a press conference, one official stated that the BoTs (parent committees) were expected to hold schools accountable for their performance;

however, all the participants indicated that it was not the case. To support that, in one of the early works about accountability, Frymier (1996, p.43) wrote:

> "The relationships of freedom, authority, equality, responsibility, accountability, policymaking and implementation, and evaluation are complex. Nevertheless, those relationships must be explicated and comprehended if the possibility of improving schools through accountability is to be realised."

Frymier's findings indicate the complexity of implementing accountability and operationalising it in complex and multi-dimensional systems such as education. It has been argued that a good accountability system provides a clear set of responsibilities and expected outcomes (UNESCO, 2017). In public institutions, government officials are expected to comply with a set of guiding legislations and policies that organise the accountability relationships with other constituents (Mashaw, 2006). What distinguishes public institutions is their hierarchical nature as Mashaw explained, which could help education systems reach a level of clarity regarding who is accountable and for what. However, many systems fail to explicitly identify how, which usually encompasses performance standards and procedures. It requires developing multi-layered accountability tools at the horizontal as well as vertical levels in the education system.

In the interviews, the MEHE officials reported that the accountability tools were not effectively implemented because of their ambiguity . That generated feelings of doubt and mistrust from the schools; it was schools that suffered the most from that ambiguity. Schools struggled to meet the high expectations set by the reform designers in the absence of capacity building. For instance, it has been reported that teachers struggled to teach the newly introduced curriculum standards, (Zellman et al., 2009). And the analysis of a comprehensive survey conducted by Qatar University revealed that Independent school leaders felt less confident that teachers adequately comprehended the new curriculum standards (Al-Emadi et al., 2015). To support that, the research participants confirmed that the QCEA assessments were very ambitious because they were developed based on the curriculum standards. Had the assessments and the curriculum standards been developed jointly with local educators working in schools, the outcomes of the accountability mechanisms would have been better. Teachers appreciated the return of the Ministry’s control in 2016 because they were not responsbile for designing their own curriculum.

MEHE officials agreed that the policies were adopted from western agencies in the beginning. The borrowed policies either did not fit the context or were misunderstood by educators working in SEC and schools. They also confirmed not receiving enough training before implementing them. This has resulted in the low utilisation of many of the core tools as explained in the previous chapter.

6.2.3 Inconsistency in Implementation

The data revealed that the ENE reform suffered constant changes that occurred since the beginning of the reform; that resulted in a changing set of tools for accountability based on what was believed to be important at the time. This has led to the neglect of other intended and critical mechanisms like the QCEA assessments and school evaluations. A former official (MEHE3) confirmed that "schools witnessed inconsistencies in how they were approached from the Supreme Education Council, it fluctuated between extreme centralisation and extreme autonomy". Analysis of the responses of the MEHE officials revealed that due to the novelty of the reform and the absence of the institutional structures, accountability mechanisms were developed on the spot.

RAND's evaluative study of the reform implementation in 2007 concluded that in terms of promoting autonomy and accountability in the system, public schools have made minimal and disappointing progress compared to the initial reform goals. The report emphasised that constant policy changes at the beginning of the reform "undermined key goals and reduced transparency" (Zellman et al., 2009, p. 146). Similarly, an article published about the reform highlighted that because of the complexity of the reform structure and ambitious expectations, officials needed to "make strategic adjustments" (Supreme Education Council, 2007a, p.5).

It would have been wiser if officials committed to the ambitious reform plans and worked gradually on addressing the implementation challenges to meet them than lowering the bar or making changes to silence schools and parents. Systems and structures need time to be developed, and institutional performance is improved by learning from failures. Constantly changing plans provoked feelings of uncertainty among schools and parents. One of the key themes that emerged from the analysis was that there was a lack of stability in how the policies were implemented, and there were constant changes made. The level of change required in

schools needed stability and commitment to plans; changes distracted schools and made it difficult to measure the impact of the original accountability mechanisms.

Due to the lack of understanding among policymakers of the reform's principles and new policies, they made many changes that affected their implementation and impact on the system. The modified policies looked very rigid and did not align with the autonomy principle. Moreover, the failure to communicate a unified message by both the Education and Evaluation institutes signalled the inconsistency in developing and committing to unified plans that serve all schools.

According to Ben Jaafar, the inconsistencies faced in implementing the accountability mechanisms in Qatar were due to the lack of internal human capacity (Ben, Jafaar, 2011). Moreover, RAND brought the system's capacity to light in their 2007 review and confirmed that: (1) the SEC officials needed to enhance the system's policy development process, and (2) the system needed to improve its data utilisation capacity (Zellman et al., 2009). In Qatar, massive investments targeted temporary solutions that did not address the root causes of the initially identified issues (Nasser, 2017). Consequently, Qatar's efforts to reform education received much criticism and were either neglected or stopped to respond to the public demands.

Unfortunately, many education systems tend to shift their focus to address the demands and needs of those with more power and authority (UNESCO, 2017, Levin, 1974). Thus, officials find themselves distracted between the public demands and other national obligations, which can be difficult to balance. Trying to address various stakeholders' needs with little consideration to the information available lead to systems being responsive negatively by changing and shifting plans constantly. Consequently, changes convey under-preparedness and the absence of a vision. Therefore, commitment to long-term goals that are communicated is necessary to achieve success.

6.3 A Modified Accountability Direction in Qatari schools

Today, Qatar's MEHE can learn a lot from the bold implementation of the ENE reform plans, especially with the alignment of the new centralised governance structures with accountability as a principle. The thesis findings confirm that compared to the other reform principles, the introduced accountability mechanisms were among the important gains from the

reform. The ENE reform established the foundation for a standards-based accountability system. Today, government schools in Qatar are being monitored using standards-based tools and are experiencing the growth of the culture of evaluation for improvement and public and transparent data dissemination. As discussed in the findings, it would not be wise nor realistic to suggest new accountability tools; without utilising the current tools to the fullest. Hence, the model suggested below provides a simplified accountability framework that could be further enhanced and maximised using the current tools.

Table 6. Modified accountability framework for Qatar

Type	Tool	Who	To whom	Time frame	Purpose	Reference
Formative	On-going assessments	Schools	MEHE Parents	Monthly	Assess students' performance, identify gaps, and develop improvement plans	NCS
	Annual self-reviews	Schools	MEHE	Annually	Identify performance gaps and develop annual plans	NCS-NPSTSL
	MEHE Inspections	MEHE	Schools	Monthly	Monitor performance and provide guidance	NCS-NPSTSL
	Organisational Structure	Schools	MEHE	Monthly	Monitor performance and provide guidance	NCS-NPSTSL
	Board of Trustees	Schools	MEHE Parents	Monthly	Monitor performance and provide guidance	NCS-NPSTSL
	Teachers Annual Appraisals	Schools	MEHE	Annually	Review performance and provide support/ training	NPSTSL
	School Leaders' Annual Appraisals	MEHE	Schools	Annually	Review performance and provide support/ training	NPSTSL
Summative	Teachers and School Leaders' Licensure	Schools	MEHE	Every 5 years	Quality check of educator's performance	NPSTSL
	Standardised Assessments	Schools	MEHE Parents	Annually	Sanction, support, or reward schools.	NCS
	School Evaluations	Schools	MEHE	Every 3 years		NCS-NPSTSL
	International Assessments	Schools	MEHE	Every 3- 5 years	Support or reward schools.	NCS

The model suggested above focuses only on aspects that could be supported, controlled, and managed by the MEHE; with the importance of providing the nurturing environment that supports all schools in the application of the mechanisms. It requires full utilisation of the QNEDS to have open access to school performance data, continuous reporting of school and

student achievement using SRC, parental involvement, and constant school inspections for review, support, and guidance. It also requires further professional development to support schools in utilising the tools and maximising their impact.

The new model gives schools more autonomy to conduct periodic formative reviews at the school level and utilise the current structures for accountability even more. As emphasised in previous chapters, schools need to be given some space to make decisions and take up initiatives to improve performance. The formative reviews need to be implemented at the school level with continuous guidance and support by the MEHE. According to Tarhan, et al., (2019), in Finland, the government adopted a bottom-up approach that encouraged self-evaluations and school-level assessments where teachers review and plan to improve their practices. This practice has improved the performance of schools in Finland and contributed to the system's capacity. It has been argued that new or genuine accountability approaches foster self-reviews and continuous learning culture at all levels, this consequently "build school capacity and enable thoughtful risk-taking informed by continuous evaluation to inform improvement" (Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit and Pittenger, 2014, p.4).

The role of the MEHE is emphasised in evaluations of summative nature that assess the quality of their performance with clear consequences. The new model calls for full utilisation of the NCS and NPSTSL as the core references for the accountability mechanisms. According to Shaftel (2010), assessments must line up with the standards for a successful implementation of standards-based accountability systems. However, policymakers need to be considerate in applying evaluations of summative nature as they tend to have undesired consequences as highlighted in the literature review (Copp, 2019; Smith, 2017; UNESCO, 2017; Thiel and Bellmann, 2017; Mizala and Schneider, 2014; Shaftel, 2010; Heilig and Darling-Hammond, 2008; Chapman and Snyder, 2000). It has been argued that when policymakers promote trust and a shared vision among educators, they could achieve high levels of commitment without imposing external mechanisms to hold schools accountable (UNESCO, 2017).

6.4 Recommendations

The recommendations focus on what needs to be done at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education level; they include developing clear goals, consistently applying rigorous monitoring procedures, stakeholder involvement, and long-term commitment to plans.

6.4.1 Institutional recommendations

i. Clear goals and indicators that are linked to national priorities

One of the repeated criticisms of the ENE reform was the absence of a clearly communicated plan (Al-Ammri, 2012; Al-Kubaisi, 2011). Therefore, thorough and thoughtful consideration regarding what schools are accountable for is necessary. Clarity is needed in defining how schools should achieve the intended results in light of the national priorities (Aoki, 2010). Moreover, the MEHE could define quality performance and how to measure it explicitly in light of the applied standards. It has been argued that comprehensive measures that evaluate the quality of learning at all levels should be developed to keep schools and all stakeholders focused (Students Can't Wait, 2020; Bae, 2018; Smith, 2017; Guarino and Tanner, 2012; Hamilton, Stecher and Yuan, 2012; Shaftel, 2010). The new measures must balance both test and non-test indicators to generate rich information and eliminate practices such as teaching to the test and conformity to narrow success indicators (Smith, 2017; Hamilton, Stecher and Yuan, 2012). Consequently, policymakers can assign more prominent roles and develop the current mechanisms for holding people accountable for those indicators. It is important to acknowledge that it all starts with the government, what officials focus on, progresses, and advances (Bae, 2018; UNESCO, 2017). Therefore, the MEHE could consider the adoption of comprehensive indicators to monitor the students' learning experience adequately. Besides, system-wide accountability must address all the components that contribute to student learning, including inputs, processes, and outcomes (Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit and Pittenger, 2014).

The MEHE could consider the development of annual attainable performance targets at the Ministry and school level that are monitored annually. Also, it could utilise the use of smart performance monitoring electronic applications such as the QNEDS for reporting. Keeping in mind, that goals are realistic and schools are well-supported.

ii. Rigorous monitoring and reporting procedures at all levels

When education systems adopt consistent reporting procedures focusing on well-considered indicators, systems can achieve some level of stability (Levin, 1974). Therefore, the MEHE could implement accountability mechanisms that: (a) measure progress in the agreed priority indicators and targets; (b) cover all levels starting from teachers up to officials working in the government; (c) are well communicated and explained to schools; (d)

consistently implemented by all constituents; (e) lead to sanctions or incentives; and (f) are not too prescribed or procedural.,

It has been argued that accountability is auditing; it cannot exist without monitoring and conducting quality checks and audits (Frymier, 1996). Therefore, the success of accountability as a principle lies in the processes and procedures implemented to audit and monitor the work being done. Keeping in mind that stability in implementing the procedures is necessary and constant changes can be costly and misleading. The MEHE needs to ensure stable implementation of the accountability mechanisms through improved reporting and monitoring procedures to utilise those mechanisms.

The successful implementation of this recommendation depends on policymakers' and educators' willingness to share information and use it for planning and decision-making. It is believed that "transparency of information is vital to make accountability work" (UNESCO, 2017, p.xiii). Technology puts education systems in a favourable place as it can be utilised to develop digital reports for parents and enhance their awareness about the performance of schools. It requires the development of institutional capacity at the government and school level to collect and utilise data. It also requires awareness at all levels regarding the importance of information for decision-making and development. Therefore, commitment to long-term and short-term goals and continuous monitoring of data for evidence to inform decision-making is essential.

6.4.2 Human recommendations

iii. Improved support and guidance to all schools

Schools facilitate the implementation of the government's plans and directly influence the quality of teaching and learning happening in classrooms (Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit and Pittenger, 2014). However, focusing primarily on schools as the key players for quality outcomes is neither fair nor effective; it puts schools under tremendous pressure. Therefore, the MEHE needs to be equally accountable for how it funds, supports, and manages schools (Bae, 2018; UNESCO, 2017; Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit and Pittenger, 2014). Hence, the MEHE needs to carefully consider enhancing and supporting schools to realise government goals.

The MEHE could develop mechanisms that ensure schools are supported with well-equipped instructional leaders who have the needed capabilities to improve the performance

of all students. School leaders must undergo competitive selection criteria and receive continuous professional development to maximise their influence in schools. School leaders must be trained in utilising performance data for improvement and monitoring performance. Besides, schools need to be provided with quality and sufficient teaching cadre and the needed resources for development. Improved commitment and performance levels can be reached when all stakeholders receive the needed support. According to Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit, and Pittenger (2014), new or genuine accountability encourages a continuous learning culture in schools. They wrote, "accountability will need to build school capacity and enable thoughtful risk-taking informed by continuous evaluation to inform improvement" (Darling-Hammond, Wilhoit and Pittenger, 2014, p.4.). Similarly, Bae (2018) indicates that the new approaches of accountability are moving away from notions of compliance to continuous learning and improvement.

iv. Improved communication and stakeholder engagement

Schools, parents, and the community play a significant role in implementation of accountability mechanisms. Therefore, the MEHE could develop closed loops for communication and feedback with stakeholders. It requires implementing a dynamic process that engages all stakeholders in discussing the school's performance information openly. It also requires the implementation of procedures for stakeholder engagement in policy design. Transparency and clarity in communication are essential components to increase trust and commitment. Therefore, committees for reviewing and improving the current policies and utilising their impact are necessary.

It has been argued that the success of large-scale reforms rests heavily on the buy-in and excitement of teachers, school leaders, and parents (UNESCO, 2017; Al-Emadi et al., 2015). Therefore, the MEHE could fill the chasm between policymakers and stakeholders by creating more opportunities for dialogue and discussion. Moreover, it is critical to develop committees from parents, educators, and students to start an open discussion regarding the future of education (Al-Ammri, 2012). Levin (1974, p. 375) asserts that "an accountability system is continuous and dynamic when the linkages are tight and information is generated and transmitted freely." This requires the development of accessible, timely, meaningful, and easy to read performance data that supports both policymakers, schools, and parents in their efforts to improve the performance of the system.

6.5 Conclusion

Bush (2005) points out that accountability is an essential concept in education; there is an increasing interest in developing the right mechanisms to enhance it. It is essential and certainly increases in countries like Qatar. I have witnessed the importance and challenges of accountability in the education system in Qatar. More importantly, I have seen firsthand how the pillar of the reform, accountability, has left its footprint on the Qatari education system until today. It is essential to acknowledge that there are no quick fixes in education and that progress requires patience and perseverance. Progress takes time and it is accumulated after years of experience.

"Education for a New Era represents an extremely ambitious, highly complex design for fundamentally changing Qatari schools" (Supreme Education Council, 2007a). The research results confirm that Qatar's Education for a New Era reform resulted in substantial gains regarding how the Ministry and schools operated. The struggle faced by the Qatari government in reforming its education system brought to light the complexity of adopting some of the globally sought principles such as accountability. The thesis further proves that accountability systems in education are complex and encompass more than one dimension. However, governments could promote a changing culture of transparency, monitoring, and accountability in education. They need to develop accountability systems that are context-relevant, consistent, comprehensive, and data-driven to promote gradual culture transformation and better results.

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Appendix

Appendix1: Ethical Implication Form

Doctor of Education

Department of Education | UNIVERSITY OF BATH

ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF PROPOSED RESEARCH

To be completed by the student and approved by the supervisor before any data collection takes place. Before completing the form, students should read the guidelines published by the British Educational Research Association (BERA), which are available in Moodle.

Introduction

Full name of student: Nouf Abdulla Al-Kaabi	**Student number:** 169051435
Provisional title of your study: An Analysis of how Accountability is Implemented in the School System in Qatar	
Justification for your study: The study aims to investigate the applied governance model for Qatar's school system, and further analyse how accountability is being implemented to ensure provision of quality education for all.	

Participants

1. Who are the main participants in your research (such as interviewees, respondents)? The main participants intended for the study are policy and decision makers in Qatar's education sector, school principals, and teachers. The suggested participants above will allow the researcher to understand accountability from an institutional perspective. Parents and students might be considered as 'supporting' participants to further investigate the implications of implemented accountability mechanisms.
2. How will you find and contact these participants? Participants are chosen according to their job title and the role they play in the Qatar's education. School principals and teachers working in Qatari public schools will be selected randomly.
3. How and from whom will you obtain informed consent and communicate the right to withdraw? The research proposal will be submitted to the Research Department in Qatar's Ministry of Education and Higher Education for approval. The approval will be used to get consent from all participants. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, participants will be granted anonymity and the right to withdraw will be expressed before the interview. A consent form will be signed by both researcher and the participant, and a copy of it will be given to each.
4. Have you approached any other body or organisation for permission to conduct this research? No.
4. At what stages of your research, and in what ways will participants be involved? The participants will be involved in the research through the interviews after developing a comprehensive theoretical framework from literature review. The literature review will allow the researcher to develop questions based on thorough understanding of the topic.
6. Have you considered how to share your findings with participants and how to thank them for their participation? After conducting the interviews with the participants, a follow up email will be sent for each participant to

thank them for their participation along with a soft 'electronic' copy of the consent letter signed by both the participant and the researcher. Moreover, a summary of the analysis of the responses collected from participants will be shared via e-mail or another meeting for discussion and validation.

Deception and exploitation avoidance, confidentiality, privacy and accuracy

7. How will you present the purpose of your research? Do you foresee any problems? The purpose of the study will be briefly described in the interview request sent to the participants via e-mail or phone call. The research is focused on understanding how accountability from an institutional lens is applied in Qatar's education. Therefore, the participants will be assured that the interview questions will focus on applied mechanisms and process and their opinion regarding their effectiveness and how can they be improved.
8. In what ways might your research cause harm (physical or psychological distress or discomfort, or threat to self-esteem) to yourself or others? What will you do to minimise this? Would access to support be available (if appropriate)? There is no harm anticipated from conducting the research. The research discusses institutional and organizational matters of governance in education. The participants will be granted full anonymity and their views and responses will be confidential and only used for research purposes.
9. What measures are in place to safeguard the identity of participants and locations? Are there special circumstances for consideration e.g. special populations? The participants will be granted full anonymity and privacy regarding everything discussed in the interview.
10.How will you record information faithfully and accurately? Using a voice recorder, as well as pen and paper. A follow up review of recorded responses will be shared with all participants for validation.

11.Any additional information: Due to the sensitivity of the topic and their job titles, some participants may feel reluctant to have their interview recorded. Therefore, a pen and paper will be used to record their answers.

Student: **Nouf Abdulla Al-Kaabi**	**Signature: Nouf Al-Kaabi** **Date: 13 August 2018**
Supervising Member of Staff:	**Name:** **Signature:** **Date:**
Director of Studies (For Research Enquiry Stage)	**Name: Prof Mary Hayden** **Signature:** [redacted] **Date: 07/05/2019**

NB

Students should send a signed copy of this form to their tutor (for taught modules) or to the Director of Studies (at candidature), before any data collection takes place. A nil return is required for students not doing empirical work. Supervisors should retain a copy for their own records.

Appendix 2: Interview questions

Accountability in Education: A view of Qatar's Educational System

Accountability in public/ government institutions

1. How would you define accountability?
2. Why is accountability important (from your point of view)?
3. How does it look like if applied?
4. Who do you feel accountable for? To whom do you feel responsible?
5. Describe the accountability system implemented in your institution (procedures and operations). How does it happen?
6. What are the tools/ instruments used in your institution to hold people accountable?
7. What are the indicators that your institution use to quality assure that the governance system is effective?
8. What is the role of senior leaders in your institution in implementing and monitoring the effectiveness of the accountability system adopted?
9. Do you think the accountability system implemented in your institution effective?
10. How can the accountability system implemented in your institution be improved?

Accountability in Education

11. What are the outcomes/ impact that educational institutions (e.g., MEHE, QF) should be accountable for?
12. Who should be accountable for achieving these outcomes?
13. In complex governance systems (institution governing other institutions, e.g. schools governed by the MEHE), at what level should accountability be implemented? Which level is the most important (from your point of view)?
14. What tools/ instruments should educational institutions (e.g., MEHE, QF) use to hold others accountable for intended outcomes (at different levels)?

Appendix 3: Consent form

Nouf Abdulla Al-Kaabi

Doctorate of Education

University of Bath- UK

2017

Interview Consent Form

I [redacted] voluntarily agree to participate in the research conducted by Nouf Al-Kaabi. I understand that this research is being conducted as part of her doctoral dissertation. Therefore, I grant permission for the interview to be tape recorded and transcribed, and to be used only by Al-Kaabi for analysis of interview data. I grant permission for the interview data generated to be published in the report.

I understand that any identifiable information in regard to my name and/or agency name will *not* be listed in the dissertation or any future publication(s).

_____

Research Participant

[redacted] - Nouf Al-Kaabi

Researcher

Appendix 4: Interview Transcript

Teacher Interview Transcript

[00:00:14] Researcher: We are conducting today an interview with a government school teacher in a primary girl's school in Qatar. So we are today going to talk about the principle of accountability as it is implemented in Qatar's education. So could you please define to me what accountability means to you as a teacher?

[00:00:43] Teacher: Ok, for accountability from my point of view…I think it's the fact of being reliable and responsible for what you do and at the same time to give a satisfactory reason for your actions in the educational system. This is my own definition for accountability in education.

[00:01:03] Researcher: And why do you think it is important in schools?

[00:01:11] Teacher: Because it's reflecting on the students, because if everybody in the school is accountable for himself or herself. It's going to be reflected on the student's results. It's going to be reflected on the education system is going to be reflected on the outcomes of the educational plans. That's why it's very important.

[00:01:31] Researcher: And you talked in your definition, it is about people being accountable for their own actions and giving justifications. How does it look like in a school environment if it is applied?

[00:01:47] Teacher: In the school environment, I think it's… let me talk about like the schools in general. I think in the educational institutions, I think they are accountable for creating and managing and controlling the rules, the regulations, the policies, and also, of course, the academic plans in the workplace. Because this is going to help the workflow to go, let's say, smoothly to achieve the most important thing, which is the academic progress and success of the students.

[00:02:19] Researcher: So and what would be some of the tools implemented or procedures in a school environment or inside the schools?

[00:02:28] Teacher: Ok, for the tools? I think there are many tools that are applied to accomplish that accountability. First of all, I believe that here and in educational institutions here in Qatar… I think they are almost trying to establish and apply a very effective correlation between all the education parties. Like… they are not focusing only on one party. Let me for example, to begin with the teachers. For example, for the teacher, she has many tools that she or he is using to hold herself or himself accountable. Let's say for example, like attending the teacher classes regularly and reporting the student's work, let's say, following up with their exams, reports, taking students work through their books, notebooks, projects, homework. With all of these things, it gives the teacher the accountability and responsibility for her students. I think it's not only the teacher, of course, in the school we are talking about the higher management. We're talking about the teachers; we are also talking about the social specialists' role. It's very important also that psychological specialists, because there are many

students, as everybody knows, there are many students, maybe they have some mental problems or maybe they have some family issues or circumstances. And these things are affecting the students work and affecting the student success in the schools. So I think like there are many parties. In the last party that I hope in the future it will be more effective than now the family role. I think maybe some, some of course, not all of them, only some families and the relationship with the educational institutions, it becomes a little bit negative. Like there are many students, as I say, they have family issues or slow and very extremely low mental skills. And the school is hardly trying to manage between the role of the family and the role of the school. But mostly the school carries the whole weight than the family. But I hope… like I hope at the end that families would understand the situation and let's say that the word that say one hand cannot clap alone two hands will clap, but one doesn't clap alone. This is… these are the tools that I think are applied in the schools for the accountability.

[00:04:56] Researcher: And do you think that the current systems put in place, do they clarify the role of parents. This is, I think, an issue never addressed in schools. But there is also we talked about the roles of the teachers and the roles of the higher management inside the school. Do you think there is clarity in terms of roles and who is accountable for what?

[00:05:28] Teacher: There is clarity but the problem sometimes I feel like the job roles. Some people… they are not following their job roles exactly. For me and my point of view, I think the level of accountability should be measured according to the specifications or the job roles. For example, for me as a teacher, I think the teacher is accountable… is accountable for planning, implementing, evaluating and of course, achieving the educational outcomes of the grade that the teacher is teaching. Like you can say, in other words, I feel for myself, I feel accountable for students who are not achieving that curriculum, curriculum standards of their age. Like, I cannot feel accountable for students who didn't achieve the very basic standards of three or four or five levels lower than their grade. And this is this is a common problem that usually we face in the schools here. That the student is reaching a higher levels and she doesn't have the basic standards. And this is a very crucial issue for them. I'm not going to say from the educational system. First of all, I'm putting the weight on the family role. The families are the base, the school and the family is working together. Nobody is working alone.

[00:06:52] Researcher: The point you raised here, for example, at every level there is not a smooth progression of the students in terms of maybe acquired skills, et cetera, so meaning that if you worked really hard and the teacher before you didn't work as hard, for example, you are put on the same scale as that teacher. So if you are a good teacher or a bad teacher, it doesn't matter because there is you know, nobody is holding accountable the teachers for the actual performance of their students. Would you think that this is actually the case?

[00:07:45] Teacher: Well, actually, the case that, as I told you, I think there should be like, let me say, the social specialist, the psychological specialist, the teacher, the parents, like, we should look to all of the circumstances so we can fix the problem. But if we focus only on the teacher or if we focus only on the social specialist who will contact the family and the teacher will not do anything she will say, it's not my problem, the student have a problem, so it's not my fault. We cannot look at this in one point. We have to look to the school from all the

corners. If we fix all the corners, I believe… I believe all the students will success with achieving the curriculum standards, not only to succeed in their exams only, they will achieve the standards of their age because all the scopes from all the parties must be achieved because there is a missing part. When we look to the students who are academically low in their levels, there is something missing in one party, the teacher or the family, a mental problem, a health problem. Sometimes health problems. So there is something missing. If we complete all these parties, I believe the students will be all successful in their studies.

[00:09:00] Researcher: So one of the key issues raised in some of the research and also mentioned by some of the other teachers was the national assessments as a tool used primarily for holding schools and teachers accountable. But one of the main problems that was discussed that it was never fully utilised, would you agree? And would you think that the absence of analysis and holding people accountable for the results led to the problem you're talking about having students who were way below their actual level?

[00:09:50] Teacher: Yes, I agree with that. I totally agree with that. And there is one point that I want to raise. That the concept of the national exams for the parents and for the students, it starts to become like it's a phobia or something they are scared off. And they just have to finish it because before they used to study from the two books and the exams are coming from like not from the school. So the teachers are not totally aware of what they are going to do for the students and the questions. Even the students unfortunately, I'm teaching primary students, but unfortunately, I see this concept like I need to pass. Like…they don't have that concept that I want to be like at the top. They are just concerning themselves about we passed, it's fine. Even the family, when the mother is saying what my daughter did, did my daughter pass, yes, fine. They are only concerned about passing the exam. They are not concerning about like the skills. They will think they're focusing only to pass. They are only concerned about passing the exam and they need to go to the next grade and life goes on.

[00:11:01] Teacher: So let's say the concept in their mind is a little bit confused. That's why this is one of the reasons I think that the results are not that good.

[00:11:12] Researcher: And how can we improve that, how can we improve this as a key accountability tool to be fully utilised and to enhance the performance of the system as a whole?

[00:11:24] Teacher: Ok, I think, like maybe there would be extra workshops for the families, the parents to let them understand what's the concept of the national exams, not only for themselves, for the country also. They have to understand the national test is reflecting the country, reflecting the educational system in the country. So maybe the more we give them workshops and we let them understand what's the concept of national exams, maybe they will teach their kids like to be like more responsible and more serious about this. This is one of the ways that I think maybe the families they don't understand the national exams. My kid will study the two books and she will pass. And that's all. Maybe they don't understand why the Ministry of Education is doing this. So maybe they need more details, more clarifications.

[00:12:13] Teacher: Yeah. this is I think, the most important thing. Because the student, she spent seven hours in the school and the rest of the time she is at home. So she is communicating with a teacher and with a parent that the most two important parties. So if these two parties are like filling up their minds with the concept of national exams, it will be, I think, different for them.

[00:12:38] Researcher: Now, one of the important findings that we have discussed with a lot of the participants I interviewed was that schools actually have good accountability systems at the school level. They have reportings… they have good, I think, maybe committees inside the school and they have good monitoring tools. Would you agree that, for example, you as a teacher working in a government school, do you think that there is clarity on what you should be doing as a teacher and what you are accountable for at the school level?

[00:13:15] Teacher: At the school level really one hundred percent. Everybody is accountable of what she's doing everybody knows her job. Everybody is going like what are the roles that they have to do, starting from the guard of the school until the higher management.

[00:13:30] Teacher: But the problem is sometimes that some people it's not that much, but it's only little… some people maybe that are not doing their jobs perfectly maybe because a favour from the higher management, they know that everything will be fine.

[00:13:45] O Teacher: Or maybe some people are not looking to the perfect things. For me, when I do my work, I'm always looking for the perfect. I'm not only looking to finish my work, and that's all. I'm very detailed, I would like to have my classes to be more a model lesson every day. I'm not only focusing on some days to have an excellent class. So that perfection is also a concept. Like… maybe some stuff I'm missing, but in general, in general, everybody is knowing his job roles, is knowing what she has to do with it or what doesn't she have to do.

[00:14:19] Researcher: And what do you think the Ministry or the Supreme Education Council prior to that, did you think you as a teacher had been impacted by some of the accountability tools, maybe a proposed or implemented one by the Supreme Education Council? And what are some of the accountability tools that were implemented from the Ministry or the Supreme Education Council?

[00:14:47] One of the accountability tools, they give us a chance last semester to perform some workshops from our experience to Qatar university. So at that time, like, I was accountable of what I'm going to perform for the new teachers, for the interactive tools to be used inside, outside, inside the classroom. I was interviewed by the Ministry of Education two times. I submitted my workshop. They put their confidence; let's say they put their confidence on me. And they did rely on me after I showed them the material. So this is one of the chances that, like, this is one of the best chances that I get to reflect my experience on the new teacher and all my new experience. I did it within my school. And so it means within the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. So let's say the experience is a transferring from one to another. It's not only specified on specific group or specific teachers. Also, one of the things also that I get Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert. I get that I was the first one to get it in

my school. So it was also a big chance for me to rely on my technological experience to show it to Microsoft and then get this certificate. This was one of the one of the good things that happens also for me in this year. So let's say the chances are too much, but we have to choose the correct thing and we have to work perfectly. For me, perfection for me… is a word that I think maybe some people say, like, you just need to finish, don't focus too much on new things, but sometimes the details make the things like shining like a star.

[00:16:38] Researcher: I think I'll name maybe a couple of more tools that were actually discussed or implemented by the Supreme Education Council and now the Ministry, and tell me if they affect you as a teacher or not. So number one, the annual self- review that schools do every year?

[00:17:03] Teacher: This is the thing that everybody is waiting for. Yeah, of course it's a big thing because it shows me where are the positives of my work where the negatives. Like what are the things that I need to work on and what are the things that I did. So it's of course, it's a major thing. I cannot ignore it.

[00:17:28] Teacher: It helps me, but usually the continuous follow-up during the year for me is better because it's coming on the spot all the time like I'm not waiting until the end of the year. Or the end of the year, it's getting the summary. But for me, it's effective for me much more than 50 per cent because I'm always getting the follow-up and the feedback during the year. So when I come at the end of the year to the annual feedback, it's almost repeated for me. Like that is nothing that much anymore.

[00:17:58] Researcher: The second tool is the school evaluation?

[00:18:04] Teacher: Yes, of course, yes, of course, very much especially the coordinator and especially the higher management. Of course, one hundred per cent.

[00:18:15] Researcher: Does it affect your practice? Do you have maybe a different mandate you need to do? Does it for example, guide your practice this evaluation or…?

[00:18:29] Teacher: Yes, yes, let me say 90 per cent. Because sometimes I feel may be there are certain negative things that they wrote in the report, but it happens because there's a special circumstances and this is good at that time, like it's not always happening, but it's effective for me, it's effective.

[00:18:46] Researcher: The licensing, the teacher licensing?

[00:18:52] Teacher: For me, the thing for me until now I didn't go through with this one because they told me like the system has changed and it will be electronic, something like that. I was planning to start with this one next year.

[00:19:06] Researcher: What about the supervision, you know, inspectors or the supervisors from the education supervision team? Do you think they could be considered an accountability tool in the school?

[00:19:16] Teacher: Oh, yes, yes. I can consider them as accountability because they are looking at that. They are looking at the picture from the corners. Like if there is one part that we miss or we didn't give it like that much work.

[00:19:39] Teacher: They are telling us work more on this one. Like, you know… we have too much pressure during the week, during the month, maybe some parts, maybe we will forget it. They will come to remind or they will come and give feedback like focus on this. Don't focus too much on this.

[00:19:55] Researcher: This is the last question, what would be, you know, if you can have just an objective look at this accountability eco-system happening in the schools, in the Ministry, teachers, and parents. Do you think all its components are tied together? How can we make it much more comprehensive and effective as an accountability ecosystem or environment?

[00:20:31] Teacher: What do we need to add? Let me say we need to add more for people who are not taking the work seriously. There are some people they are coming to work just to get their salary and go out to their homes after their work. So their attitudes towards their work are not like those who are really coming to school to teach or who are really coming to school to achieve the academic plans. So if we change this belief, I think… if everybody is looking to this picture, everybody is loyal to their work. Everybody really wants their students to be perfect. I think if this mental belief is changed, plus the family role, everything I think will be fine.

[00:21:21] Researcher: Do you have any final remarks, or any suggestions, ideas?

[00:21:35] Teacher: Nothing at all, everything is clear for me, especially when the Ministry of Education and Higher Education started to regulate everything. For this before, like each school has different rules, each school has different opinions. Each manager of the school, she has different scopes. When everything started to be managed by them, and of course, when they manage things, of course, they take opinions from different people. So when the decisions are made, it's not made like personally from one person, when the decisions is helping everybody, when it starts to come from the management in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and it's circulated to all the schools, not only the specific schools. I think everything became better than before.

[00:22:21] Researcher: Thank you. That's very helpful. Thank you.

[00:22:25] Teacher: Thank you.

Appendix 5: Sample Document Analysis sample

Title of the Document	School Self-review Framework (A Practical guide for promoting quality and progress monitoring progress in Independent schools)					
Year	2007		**Type**	Official Document- Framework		
Topic	School self-review		**Issued by**	Education Institute- SEC		
Versions	Experimental Copy		**Audience**	Independent Schools -School operator- principals- senior staff- Board of Trustees		
Purpose	1) Explain in detail the self-review process for schools. 2) Provide a useful tool for schools to monitor all aspects of their performance. 3)Clarify responsibilities, define and monitor processes, collecting useful evidence for reporting, target report, professional development purposes,					
Document Objectives	What mechanisms were put in place to hold schools accountable?	Who was accountable?	What were the gaps in the implementation?	General Ideas	Quote Evidence	Description of the Document
Self-Reviews help schools conduct yearly audits following a set of quality measures and standards.	Self-review framework with quality indicators.	Schools accountable to the SEC: Education Institute.	The word accountability is hardly mentioned, and there is more focus on monitoring and continuous support.	Self-Reviews help schools conduct yearly audits following a set of quality measures and standards.	"Encouraging all schools to raise standards"	Long and repetitive
Identify and reinforce areas of strength and help the school develop capacities of all.				Self- reviews have a direct impact on classroom practices.	"The Quality indicators provide a picture of the overall change and improvement process."	56 pages long

Facilitate the monitoring of schools for the Ed. Institute.				Self- reviews help schools to design improvement plans.	"The Performance indicators .support anyone who is evaluating classroom practice."	There is a lot of detail throughout the document. The way the quality indicators differ from performance indicators. Quality indicators are organized as: Indicators focus area, examples of evidence, indicator questions followed by the four level descriptors. Performance indicators are organised as: indicators, themes, level illustrations.
Help schools design their annual plans, help inspectors in their review of the schools work.				Help schools to refine and redefine a common vision and goals.	"A quality indicator is the degree to which the implementation of processes and practices within the area of focus creates desirable conditions for improving student achievement, at a certain point of time."	
				The Self –review process help schools answer the following questions: 1. What is the level in students' progress? 2. What do students need to learn and what are the skills they need to acquire? 3. How can we change our current system to address the future needs of students?		

				5 Categories of Schools according to effectiveness		
				4 Levels of profile score based on the evidence availability		
				Two Types of Indicators: Quality and Performance		
				Aspects of Quality indicators: - Professional Leadership and Management - Curriculum Development - Teaching Practice and Learning Resources - Student Assessment and Reporting - Student Behaviour and Classroom Management - Professional Development - Performance Management - Parent and Community Relationships		

Appendix 4: Sample Interview Analysis

<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">Interview Data Analysis – Educational Experts</th><th rowspan="3">Codes</th><th rowspan="3">Themes</th></tr>
<tr><td>S.M</td><td>S.T</td><td>A.T</td><td>S.N</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Perceptions of Accountability</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">What is accountability?</td><td rowspan="3">Responsibility for actions - results - goals and targets - audit- outcomes</td><td rowspan="3">Taking responsibility for ones actions and their consequences.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Take your responsibility seriously. It is about reaching your goals and beyond your goals.</td><td>Responsibility for actions and decisions that could and couldn't of consequences of conduct.</td><td rowspan="2">When the employee reaches goals and targets.</td><td rowspan="2">Accountability is showing the results of the performance of a person or institution to the same person or institution and making these results the responsibility of this entity or person.</td></tr>
<tr><td>It is related to ownership.</td><td>Audits are taking place. Managerial level hold people accountable.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Why is accountability important?</td><td rowspan="4">Quality assurance- misuse of authority- performance improvement- proactive- compliance.</td><td rowspan="4">Fulfilling the institutional goals. Quality Assuring the performance of the institution. Avoiding authority abuse.</td></tr>
<tr><td>External accountability ensures that people don't abuse or misuse their authority.</td><td>Assurance layers, existing ethics and values such as professionalism.</td><td>.For the success of any institution, there has to be accountability through audits.</td><td rowspan="3">Makes institutions efficient, proactive, committed institutions.</td></tr>
<tr><td>External accountability doesn't promote internal accountability, but it promotes the quality of work.</td><td>Holding one person accountable through a system will encourage people to eliminate negative conduct. It will attract others to join the institution. Desciplinary action against bad conduct.</td><td rowspan="2">Accountability needs to be applied to ensure the achievement of goals, implementing regulations.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Minimize the damage and maximize the benefit of the employee.</td><td>Once you're accountability productive, the institution will be proactive.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">How does accountability look like if applied?</td></tr>
</table>

Transparency, clarity, teamwork, satisfaction, measurement.	Procedures and processes that people would be accountable for their conduct.	The definition of success must be related to targets.	Accountability is clear from the beginning: workflow- ethics- designed to achieve desired outcomes.	Clarity - indicators- goals and targets- Process and procedures- plans- mandate- Leadership - follow-up- monitoring.	Clear roles and expectations. Linked to institution's goals and objectives. Clear workflows. Continuous monitoring and follow-up.
Leadership is a key component of a good accountability system.	When a person makes a wrong decision, he is held accountable for wrong behavior.	The strategic plan can be a core component of accountability.	Public institutions need to be accountable according to its mandate.		
it is so important to choose the leader at any level, because the culture of the institution…it is always influenced…colored by the culture of the people in the top.	Roles and responsibilities of individuals. Divisional KPIs depending on the division roles. Clear business plans and guidelines. Needs to be set/ Roles on paper can't be implemented. Authority support of what's not on paper.	Lead by Example.	Clarity in roles- monitoring and follow-up.		
Having objectives makes people aware.	KPIs development and dashboards. KPIs need to be realistic to be used for accountability	Leadership style and awareness and influence at higher level with Prime Minister will influence the system as a whole.	Leaders should play the role, leadership tools: strength, committed, flexibility to apply mandate.		
Participation of all stakeholders		Assigning responsibilities to people with clear roles.	Indicators and commitment of people. Promoted by the culture.		

Appendix 5: Findings Validation

AN ANALYSIS OF HOW ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM IN QATAR

Abstract:

Qatar's *Education for a New Era* reform changed the landscape of education in the country. Due to its scope and impact, the reform remains a topic of interest for Qatar's educators and researchers after sixteen years from its launch in 2004. The reform restructured how education was governed; shifting from a strictly centralised to a decentralised system that emphasised novel principles: autonomy, choice, variety, and accountability. With heavy reliance on western agencies in the design and implementation, the reform plans did not roll out as smoothly as expected and policymakers received continuous criticism. In 2016, the government called for more control and claimed its authority returning to centralised control over government schools.

Although many of the reform initiatives and principles came to an end, accountability remained because of its alignment with a centralised education system. Hence, the thesis investigates the principle of accountability to identify its core mechanisms, learn about the perceptions of stakeholders, and elicit lessons learned to inform future improvement efforts.

The thesis revealed three key findings: (1) the implementation of the core accountability mechanisms was inconsistent and lacked coherence; (2) the accountability mechanisms were ambiguous and unclear, and (3) the system's capacity hindered successful implementation of the mechanisms. The thesis findings emphasise two key dimensions of accountability: human and institutional. The findings regarding the human dimension confirm that stakeholder involvement, capacity, and buy in are extremely important for enhancing accountability in any system. On the other hand, the institutional findings confirm that ambiguity of some accountability mechanisms, absence of clear plans, and inconsistent implementation hinder successful application of accountability mechanisms in educational systems. The recommendations call for more coherence in implementing current accountability mechanisms with more stakeholder engagement and capacity building at the school level.

Summary of research findings:

1. **Stakeholder perceptions of accountability.**
   a. **Its definition**

MEHE officials, schools, and educational experts defined accountability as the act of being fully responsible for their actions and the consequences of those actions. There were a number of common keywords that the participants used to define the term that included: responsibility, goals, results, control, evaluation, indicators, and quality. Despite their varying backgrounds and experiences, as highlighted in the previous chapter, their understanding of the term leaned more towards the institutional (or operational) aspect than the moral or personal aspect.

b. Its significance

There was no disagreement regarding the importance of accountability as a principle for governing schools. Its importance lied in its ability to ensure delivering good educational services for all students, achieving intended outcomes, and improving performance. All the participants strongly believed that government institutions, schools, and teachers would not fulfil their roles and achieve their intended goals without accountability. In general, their responses emphasised the role of accountability in clarifying what is expected from others, enhancing ownership of behaviour, and the individuals' sense of responsibility and belonging to their institutions.

c. Features of Sound Accountability Systems

- Clearly defined goals and targets
- Clear roles and mandates
- Continuous self- reviews and audits
- Good leadership

2. Accountability tools to hold schools accountable

a. Intended Tools:

- Fiscal audits
- Qatar's Comprehensive Education Assessments (QCEA)
- School Evaluations
- School annual self-reviews
- SEC inspections
- The Teachers and School Leaders Licensure
- School Report Cards
- International Assessments
- Independent Schools' Boards of Trustees

b. Supporting Tools:

- The Professional Standards for Teachers and School Leaders
- The Organisational Structure of Independent schools
- Qatar National Education Data System (QNEDS)

3. Gaps in implementation

- Schools need autonomy to be accountable
- Weak human capacity affects accountability
- Unclear expectations and responsibilities
- Low utilisation of core accountability tools
- Incompetent school leaders hinder accountability efforts

Please answer the following questions about the findings presented above.

1. Do the findings give a credible and realistic view of the topic of study? Justify.
2. What findings that need to be emphasised?
3. Please add any additional comments about the presented above.